

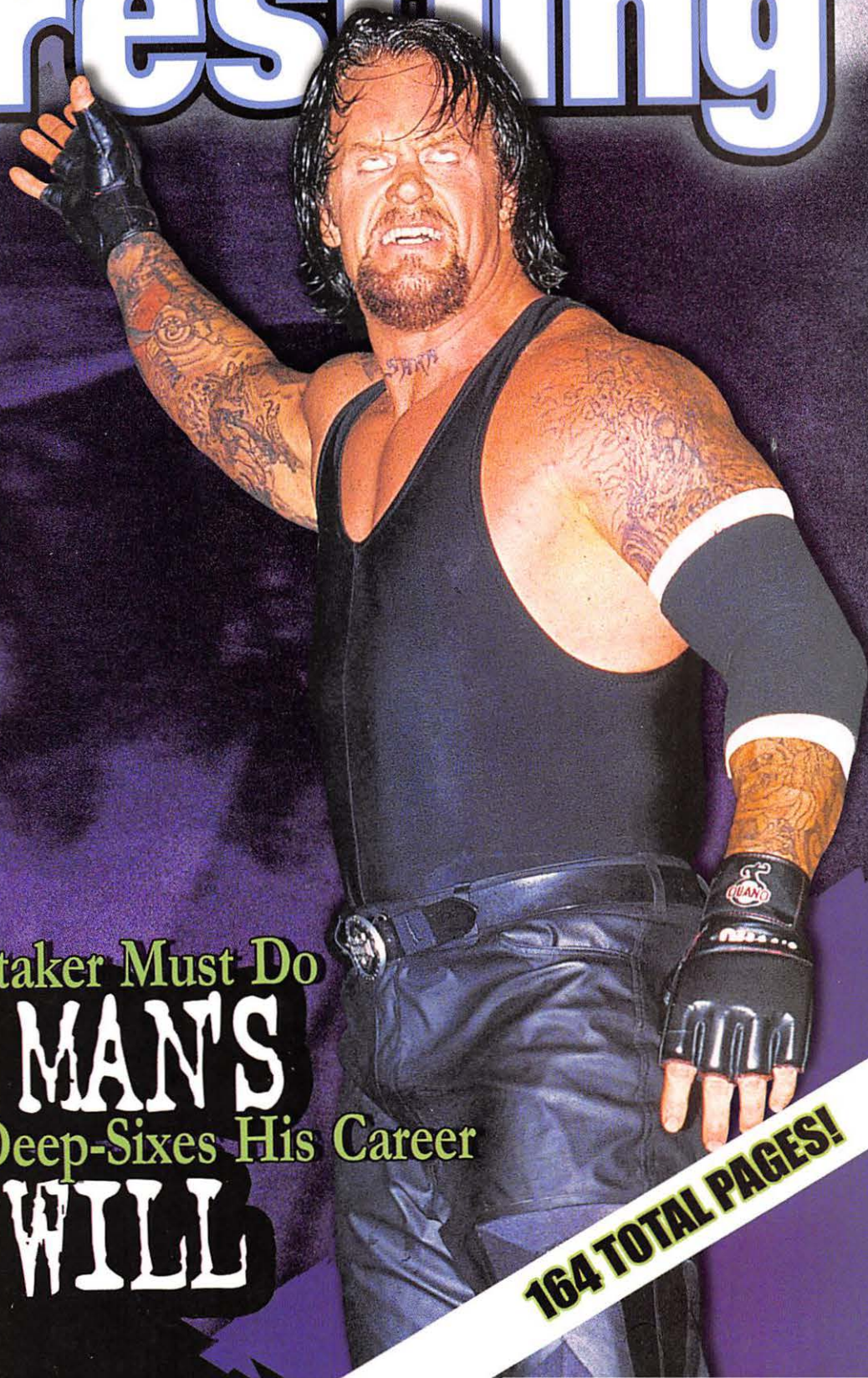
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**DEAD MAN'S**

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WWE U.S. champion

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THE MAGAZINE THAT RIPS THE LID OFF PRO WRESTLING

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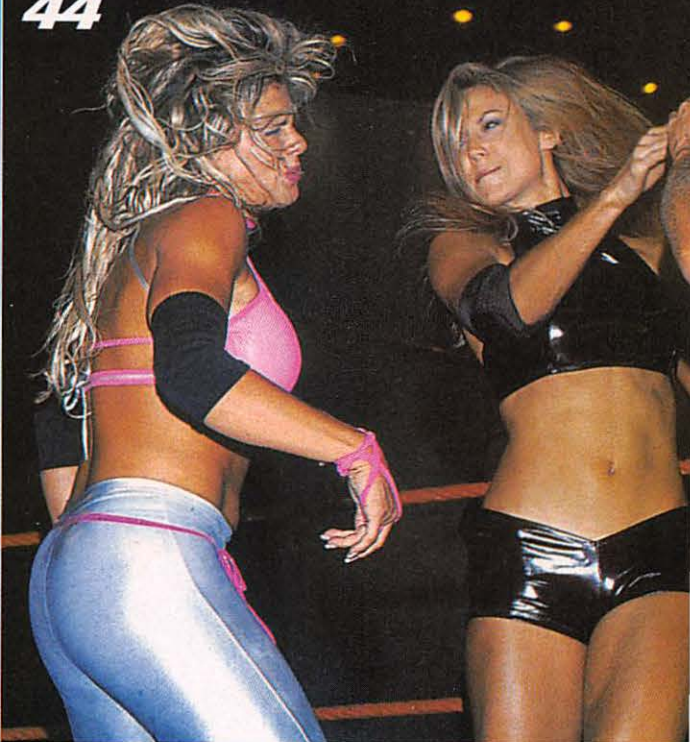
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Look for the November 2004 issue of  
INSIDE WRESTLING, on sale August 10, 2004



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**Sincerely Yours**

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## NO ONE'S "DESERVING"

I'm tired of listening to my friends tell me how much Eddie Guerrero and Chris Benoit are deserving champions. What does that mean? I heard the same thing about Jerry Lynn years ago, when he was ECW champion. Yet I've never heard it about Triple-H, and I didn't hear it about Brock Lesnar or Bill Gold-

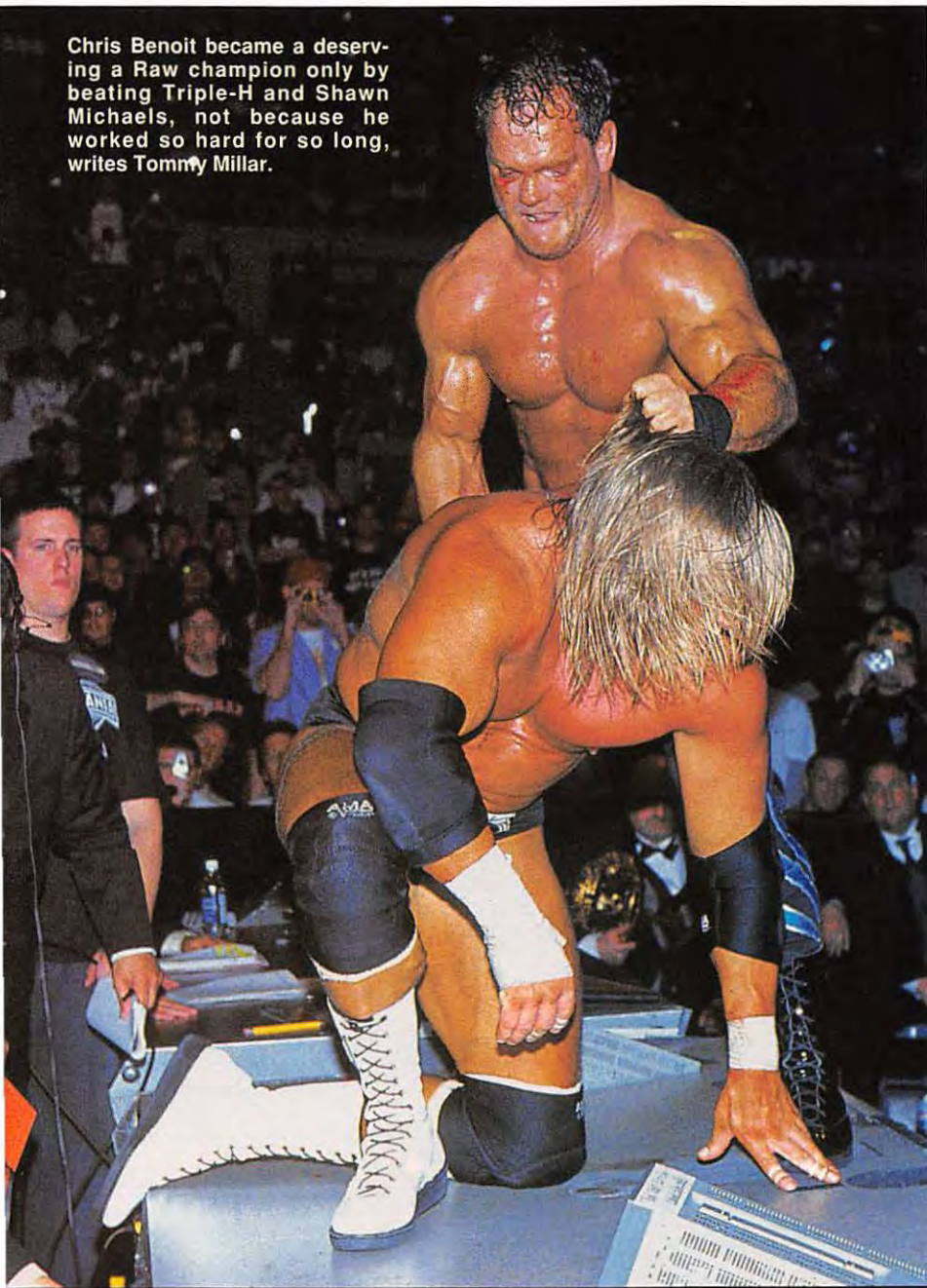
berg. I've never even heard Steve Austin described as a "deserving champion."

Listen, championships aren't given out like candy. They aren't given out for a job well done, either. Championships have to be *earned* in the ring. You have to pin your opponent or make him submit—and you have to do that while foiling his best efforts to do the same to you! If you're lucky enough to do that against a wrestler holding a championship, great, because then you're the new champion. If not, you're not going to walk away with the belt or the title.

Is it nice that Benoit and Guerrero finally overcame the biggest obstacles of their careers and became the Raw and Smackdown champions, respectively? Of course. But if they had never won a major championship, I'm here to say that their failure would've made them *undeserving* of being a champion.

TOMMY MILLAR  
Rome, NY

Chris Benoit became a deserving a Raw champion only by beating Triple-H and Shawn Michaels, not because he worked so hard for so long, writes Tommy Millar.

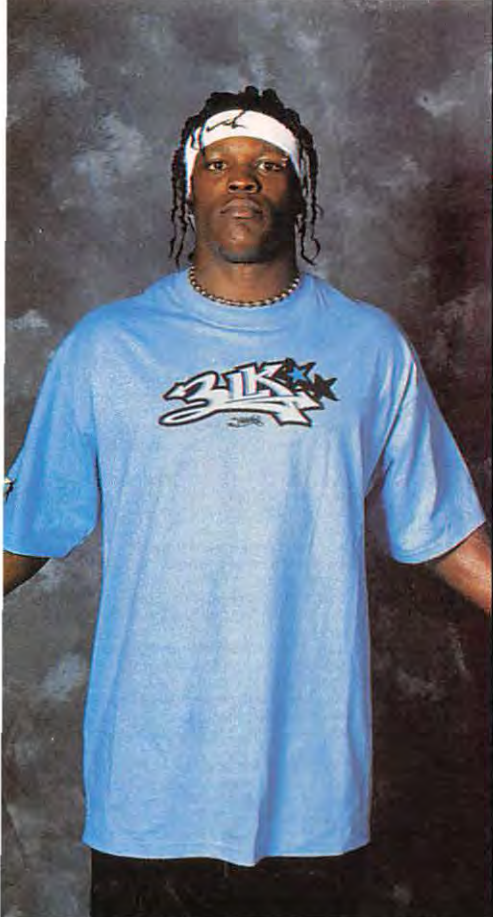


## KILLINGS MACHINE

It's good to see Ron "The Truth" Killings back in NWA-TNA's main event mix. He was an extraordinary champion for the promotion during its early stages, and he really helped to establish the promotion as big time.

After he lost the title to Jeff Jarrett, he got pushed back down the card for some reason. His team with B.G. James and Konnan, while entertaining, didn't allow "The Truth" to show off his skills like it should have, and he wasn't really involved in anything special. He got lost in the mix while TNA quietly became the Jarrett, Raven, A.J. Styles, and Vince Russo variety show. If you weren't feuding with one of those guys, then you weren't feuding with anyone who mattered.





Ron Killings is starting to distance himself from 3 Live Kru and has refocused on regaining the NWA title. That pleases reader Eric Sharpe.

While I still feel that's somewhat the case, at least Killings is maneuvering himself into position for shots at the NWA championship. I'd like to see him become champion for a second time.

ERIC SHARPE  
Parker, AZ

### COMIC CRUSADE

I'm a big fan of wrestling. I also read a lot of comic books, and I think wrestling people could learn a thing or two from the way the comic industry runs its business. From what I can tell, the biggest problem wrestling has is that the creative departments are burned out on developing storylines for the same characters over and over again. They can't come up with anything imaginative because they've already used their best ideas at least twice and maybe three times over. So we're left with recycled storylines.

Now look at comic books. Like

wrestling, the same characters are the centerpieces of their respective universes—and most of the big names, such as Superman, Batman, Spiderman, and The Avengers, have been around for decades. The characters have been through a lot, yet people keep coming back for more. Go to a comic book store on a Wednesday afternoon, and you'll not only find young, wide-eyed kids there, but also working professionals who have been buying comic books for five, 10, or 20 years. Something must be working to keep these long-time fans coming back for more, right?

Right. And the thing that is working right is rotating writers. No matter how skilled a writer has been on a particular comic, he eventually leaves before he gets burned out on the project and starts recycling storylines. A fresh,

new writer—with, quite possibly, a whole different take on the character—takes the helm. And that's exactly what wrestling organizations need to do with their writers. If they rotated some in and out, perhaps only limiting them to working with a specific number of wrestlers for a specific amount of time, the promotions would benefit.

I know I don't know everything, but it sure has worked for the comic industry over the years.

JOHN K. DODSON  
Bickelton, WA

### LOSING THE LOTTERY

WWE's draft lottery was silly. Hardly any of the moves made any sense! Eric Bischoff drafted Paul Heyman? Who would allow

such a thing to happen! What would have occurred had Bischoff selected Heyman first and not last? Who would have drafted for Smackdown after that? I guess Vince McMahon could have, but it would've taken away the "us vs. them" feel of the lottery.

Out of all the wrestlers who switched brands, nobody can tell me that Tajiri isn't the wrestler who got the worst of the deal. What's he going to do on Raw, compete for a nonexistent cruiserweight title? We know he'll never even come close to winning the Raw championship. That's not a knock, but it won't happen. So, instead, he's probably going to get buried on Raw, where he'll probably be featured on *Sunday Night Heat* and little else.

What a shame. He's too good to get lost in the mix.

PAUL MIKI  
Palisade, MN



Tajiri's dreams of winning the WWE cruiserweight title for a fourth time are on hold now that he's a Raw wrestler. Paul Miki doesn't like his overall prospects with Raw.



# INSIDE Wrestling

## BACK ISSUES

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By Harry Burkett

**T**HE "STONE-COLD" ERA in WWE is over. **Steve Austin** has walked out of WWE for the third time in his career, and it looks as if he will be gone for quite a while. Austin is leaving for some of the same reasons he left the company before. Another domestic abuse allegation, this time leveled by his former girlfriend, **Tess Broussard**, and continuing creative clashes are factors. Both sides were hopeful that a last-minute deal could be worked out to renew his contract this past April, but, after many efforts, Austin and WWE decided to part ways.

Unlike Austin's infamous June 2002 walkout, when he failed to appear at a live *Raw* without any notification, **Vince McMahon** has obviously decided not to bury Austin on television. In fact, WWE has opted to ignore Austin's departure and to continue with business as usual.

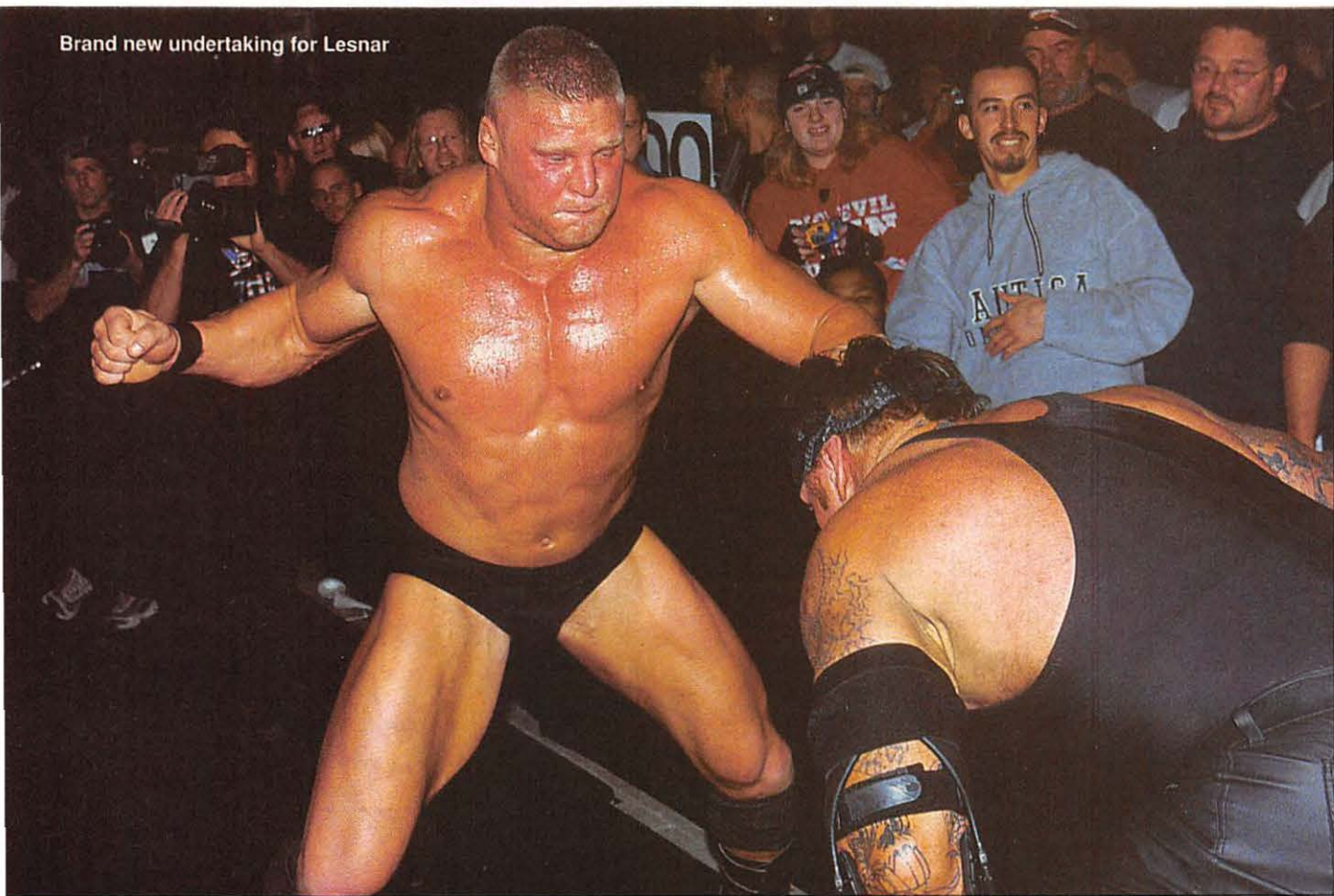
On April 16, WWE released an official statement: "After months of negotiations, the WWE and Steve Austin have been unable to come to terms on a new contract and, as a result, have mutually agreed to part company.

Both parties have left the door open to work together again in the future and the WWE wishes Steve the very best in his future endeavors."

A major sticking point of the negotiations was that Austin wanted the right to use his "Stone-Cold" nickname for non-WWE ventures. Austin contended that it was he and ex-wife **Jeannie Clarke** actually thought of the nickname, and that WWE had simply trademarked it to promote his character. He was no doubt aware that **The Rock** had secured the rights to his wrestling name from Vince McMahon with relative ease. But the parting of ways was a relatively amicable one.

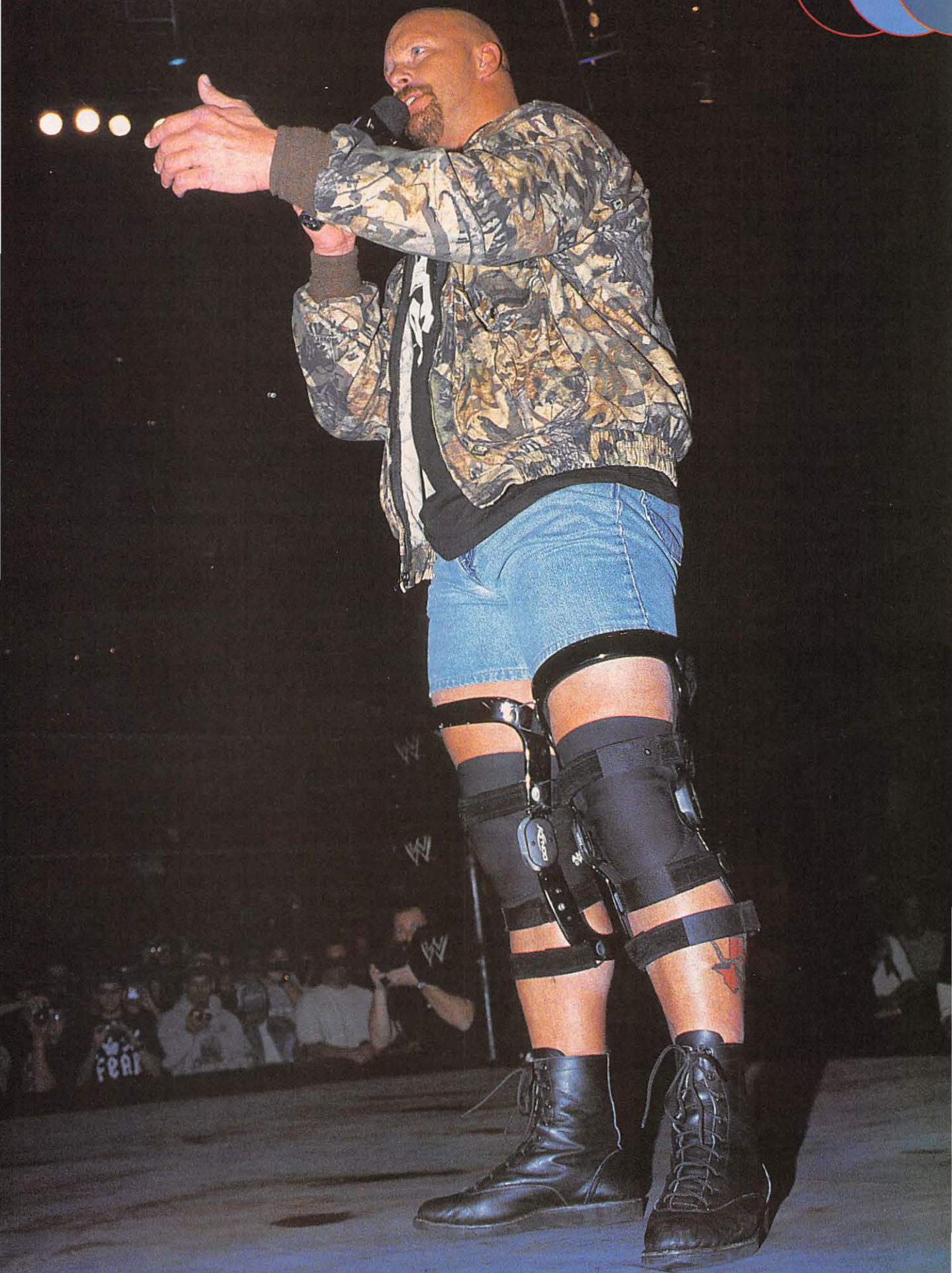
Suddenly, the dream match of the 1990s—Steve Austin vs. **Bill Goldberg**—has become a distinct possibility. McMahon completely missed the opportunity to pit these superstars against each other, a foul-up on par with his failure to book **Hulk Hogan** vs. **Ric Flair** in a dream match in the early-1990s, although to be fair to the WWE chairman, by the time he signed Goldberg, Austin was having major neck

Brand new undertaking for Lesnar





***Steve Austin: Gone ... for now***





problems again. Austin and Goldberg were on speaking terms long before "Da Man" entered WWE, and the two are probably very anxious to capitalize on their much-anticipated rivalry. This bout, if it happens, would most likely happen in Japan and could possibly be available via pay-per-view in the United States.

NWA-TNA officials must be eyeing these two free agents and salivating, but they would have to raise a lot of cash in order to book them. But while **Brock Lesnar's** WWE deal wouldn't allow him to compete in TNA, might he be able to make some appearances in Japan, perhaps on the same shows as Austin and Goldberg?

We'll keep dreaming. For now, Lesnar is still pursuing a career in the NFL. But first, Lesnar will have to fully recover from a relatively minor motorcycle accident that occurred on April 18. He crashed his motorcycle into a minivan and required stitches after glass was removed from his forehead. Meanwhile, rumors persist that his hometown team, the Minnesota Vikings, are open to the possibility of signing Lesnar. "Why not?" said Vikings coach **Mike Tice**, who admitted he was intrigued with the idea during an interview with the (Minneapolis-St. Paul) *Pioneer Press*. "Everything intrigues me if helps us win another game."

The Kansas City Chiefs invited Lesnar to attend a minicamp, but the former WWE Smackdown champion declined because he wanted to maintain his rigorous training schedule in Phoenix. Although Lesnar said he expected to work out for a number of teams by the end of May, the Vikings are his first choice. He is already set to participate in a private workout with that team. *Sports Illustrated* already plans to do a story on Lesnar's attempt to break into pro football.

Coach Tice is correct: All of this is very intriguing.

**Lance Storm** announced that Ohio Valley Wrestling would be his new home base—after making the decision to retire as an active wrestler. Storm has enjoyed training wrestlers ever since he did that as an instructor at the Hart Brothers Wrestling Camp in Calgary several years ago, and few are as fundamentally sound as he is. Fittingly, his last match occurred against **Steven Richards** at a *Sunday Night Heat* taping in Calgary. Storm

cited multiple bulging disks in his back, as well as frustration over his lackluster push in WWE, though he wouldn't totally rule out the possibility of returning to competition at some point. "I am still going to be a part of this business and I am confident enough to think an important part," noted a serious Storm on his Web site. "If I can pass on my knowledge to the future of this business, perhaps I can still, indirectly, have a positive effect on [the fans'] wrestling enjoyment."

There were several intriguing developments at Backlash, held on April 18 in Edmonton, Alberta. In the much-anticipated rematch from *WrestleMania XX*, hometown hero **Chris Benoit** defended his Raw title against **Shawn Michaels** and **Triple-H**. In that battle, Triple-H smacked Michaels in the back with his trusty sledgehammer, and then Benoit managed to pull Triple-H onto the arena floor. Benoit re-entered the ring and snared Michaels in a sharpshooter. Canadian fans rejoiced as "The Heartbreak Kid" submitted to their favorite finisher.

Intercontinental champion **Randy Orton** continued blazing his trail to superstardom, this time with a brutal and bloody victory over **Cactus Jack (Mick Foley)** in a no-holds-barred match. Orton defeated the hardcore legend in convincing style, with an RKO on top of a bat wrapped in barbed wire. Orton's **Evolution** cohort **Ric Flair** dropped Backlash's opening match to the up-and-coming **Shelton Benjamin**. This is clearly a case of another youngster being groomed to become a main-eventer.

Also at Backlash: **Edge** defeated **Kane** ... **The Hurricane** and **Rosey** beat **La Resistance** ... Women's champion **Victoria** defeated **Lita** ... **Chris Jericho** pinned **Christian** in a handicap match also involving **Trish Stratus** ... **Jonathan Coachman** defeated **Tajiri**.

Even more disgusting than Coachman's win over Tajiri was the unrelenting presence of **Eugene Dinsmore** at Backlash. The slow-witted Eugene, the "nephew" of Raw General Manager **Eric Bischoff**, wandered backstage to sneak peeks at the WWE divas, and caused La Resistance's embarrassing loss.

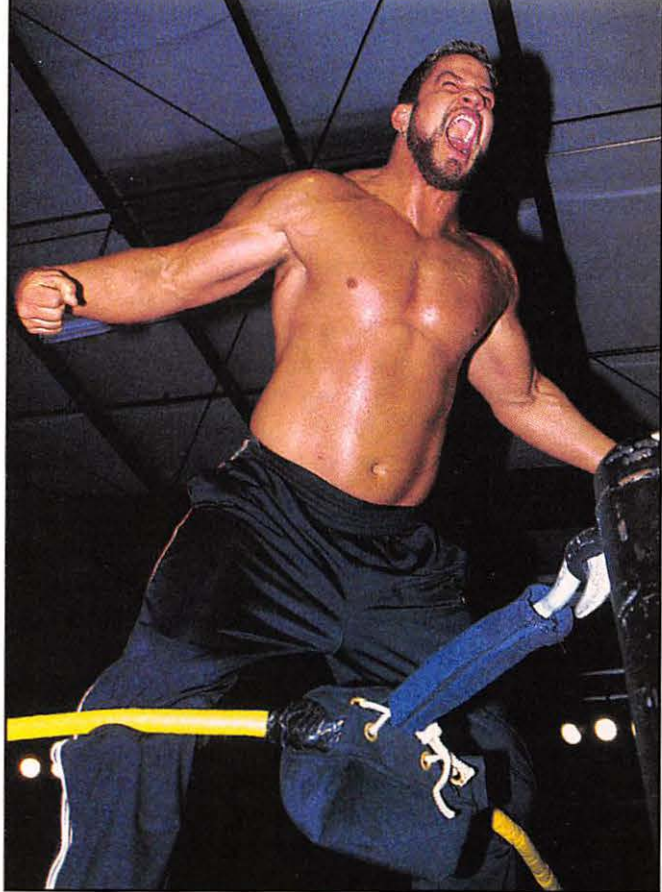
How did this goofy character come about? It all stems from **Nick Dinsmore** (now known as Eugene) losing the Ohio Valley title to **Matt Morgan** on April 14. As a result of the loss, WWE executive **John Laurinaitis** forced Dinsmore to continue to play that humiliating character on Raw. Laurinaitis is determined to use his thugs—Southern tag team champions **Brent Albright** and **Chris Masters**, along with **Inspector Impact** (who recently appeared on *Smackdown* as **Kurt Angle's** bodyguard, **Luther**)—to turn OVW into his personal playground. Morgan, however, is assuming the mantle of the recently released **Sean O'Haire**, and is claiming to be the promotion's new "equalizer."

Finally, a Fox Sports Net executive has commented on the negotiations between that network and NWA-TNA officials, who hope to secure a time slot in the near future. "We've had some conversations with [TNA], but there's been nothing beyond that at the moment," the anonymous source told the *New York Post*. "If something was going to happen, we'd be looking at a mid-afternoon weekly show, and June would be a date we might be



Storm: soon-to-be-trainer





Morgan: indirectly responsible for Eugene

looking at." We'll keep you posted on this situation.

As TNA tries to position itself as a major league organization on Fox Sports Net, it is placing more restrictions on its talent roster. TNA officials have ordered contracted talent—including **Christopher Daniels** and new NWA champion **A.J. Styles**—to pull out of all future commitments with Ring of Honor. Exactly how much this has to do with the allegations against former ROH head **Rob Feinstein** is up for debate.

**Bob Ryder** of TNA Entertainment addressed the controversy in a written statement: "We very much wanted to resolve the issue in an amicable fashion and made what we believed to be a very fair and reasonable suggestion as to how to get past the concerns we had regarding ROH ownership. We remain open to discussing the matter with the appropriate ROH officials and hope they will be able to take the steps we requested to resolve the dispute quickly." Well, that clears everything up ... I guess.

This 'n' that: Three-time former WCW World champion **Dallas Page** will be emerging from retirement to wrestle at the Lucky Star Casino in Concho, Oklahoma. Page is making that appearance as a favor to his mentor, **Dusty Rhodes**, who will be promoting the event. Page has settled his Lloyd's of London policy and will be visiting Kurt Angle's surgeon, **Dr. Hae-Dong Jho**, regarding possible spinal surgery. It looks like he'll be accepting independent bookings in the future ... **Homicide** has been on a rampage in Ring of Honor as of late. After throwing a fireball at ROH champion **Samoa Joe** at a show in St. Paul, Homicide went crazy backstage, causing officials to cancel all post-show promos ... Edmonton Mayor **Bill Smith** made a special presentation

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**RAISING HELL SOMEWHERE ELSE?** Steve Austin considering a match in Japan is even more significant than it may seem at first glance. This would be the first time "Stone-Cold" would be working for a rival promoter since he revolutionized WWE in the mid- to late-1990s. This is like Hulk Hogan's matches in Japan in 1994. It might be a step toward something else, perhaps an affiliation with another U.S.-based promotion. But how will his neck hold up? We shall see.

**BROCK TAKING STOCK.** The former Smackdown champ was forced to do a real soul search just before WrestleMania XX. Should he throw away a multimillion-dollar career with WWE for a long shot at the NFL? I find this amazing, considering that Lesnar didn't even bother to play football in college. Perhaps Lesnar wants to prove his worth as an athlete again, much like Kurt Angle's dalliance with the 2004 Olympics. He'll be back.

**SIMPLE IS AS SIMPLE DOES.** When are promoters going to get it? Fans do not appreciate pro wrestlers acting like they have mental or learning disabilities. I can't believe WWE is giving Eugene Dinsmore air time in this day and age. Think of his forerunners: Norman the Lunatic and the later incarnation of the George "The Animal" Steele. It's shameful. If these images were at all realistic, it would be a different story.

**THE STORM HAS PASSED BY.** The man who was once hailed as Bret Hart's successor in the ring has now announced his retirement. WWE Creative showed a blatant unwillingness to invest any energy or thought into Lance Storm since he arrived in 2001. While Storm—at only 35—disclosed that his nagging injuries were worse than most people knew, it's no doubt that this lackluster push affected his decision.

**DOES THE DIAMOND STILL SPARKLE?** Although I'm sorry that Storm is calling it quits, I can't believe that "Diamond" Dallas Page is coming out of retirement for an actual match (and probably more). I realize the odds are against a slobber-knocker at the Lucky Star Casino or anywhere else, but it's incredible Page still thinks he has something to prove—or craves the spotlight so much. Page was a great manager earlier in his career. He should go back to that again.

to Raw champion Chris Benoit at City Hall in the week leading up to Backlash.

If you've already read my 60-minute "Q & A" interview with **Rick Steamboat** in the *Wrestler* portion of this monster issue, you'll be interested to know that "The Dragon" became involved in some ROH action re-





DDP is back in the game!

ons **Mark** and **Jay Briscoe** made the save.

When Cabana and Punk got into a fight with the Briscoes later in the show, Steamboat arrived on the scene, chopping and arm-dragging both Cabana and Punk. The following night in Chicago Ridge, Illinois, Cabana and Punk gained revenge when they ended the Briscoes' six-month title reign—with help from fellow **Second City Saints** member **Ace Steel**.

News from NWA Extreme Canadian Championship

Wrestling: **Tony Kozina** pinned **Major Hardway** for the NWA Canadian junior heavyweight title in Surrey, British Columbia. Kozina is also a former NWA junior heavyweight champion ... **Seth Knight's** mysterious cohort, **The Terminator**, has turned out to be **Skag Rolins**. Terminator unmasked after causing Knight to lose to **Michelle Starr** by disqualification ... ECCW planned a Pacific Cup Tag Team Tournament, a sequel to its annual singles tourney. It was set to be a two-night event in May in Vancouver and New Westminster.



More junior glory for Kozina

From the To Be The

Man You Have To Thank The Man Dept.: Republican Party officials have tried on several occasions to persuade Ric Flair to run for governor of North Carolina. The "Nature Boy" hasn't agreed to that idea yet, but he remains an enthusiastic supporter of his fellow Republicans, including **President Bush**. During a campaign luncheon held on April 5 in Charlotte, Bush acknowledged Flair's presence in the room. "I want to thank Ric Flair, professional wrestler," said the President. "He's with us today. 'Big' Ric, I'm proud you're here. Thank you for coming. We won North Carolina last time. We're going to win it this time. And I appreciate your help."

Before we part, I would like to pass along my get-well wishes to **Steve Williams**. "Dr. Death" was scheduled to undergo surgery on April 6 to remove his voice box, which has been affected by cancer. But Williams sought a second opinion and is now undergoing chemotherapy and radiation treatment instead. He is in the cancer care unit of **M.D. Anderson** Hospital in Houston.

The gutsy Williams kept his battle with cancer private for the most part, and still went forward with a shootfight against kickboxer **Alexey Ignashov** on March 14. Williams lost the match, partly due to his bout with cancer, and finally disclosed his illness. UWF alumni **Bill Watts**, **Ted DiBiase**, and **Jim Ross** have been in touch with the Oklahoma native. Our prayers are with you, Steve.

That's all for now. See you at the matches. □



Keep Williams in your thoughts



# wrestling bargain packs!

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## RENE DUPREE

HEIGHT: 6'3"

WEIGHT: 250

HOMETOWN: Montreal, Quebec

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE:

March 22, 2004—the night he was drafted by Smackdown.

Dupree is clearly the La Resistance member with the biggest upside, and he'd gone as far as he could as a member of that threesome. Being forced to go solo with a new brand was the best thing that could have happened to him.

**HE DOES IT SO WELL:** He's just so fluid in the ring as he hits one move after another. And he has amazing poise for a 20-year-old.

**WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE:** He needs to go beyond the stereotypical arrogant Frenchman character. It's so one-dimensional. He can do better.

**PET FINISHER:** Dupree driver (modified Michinoku driver)

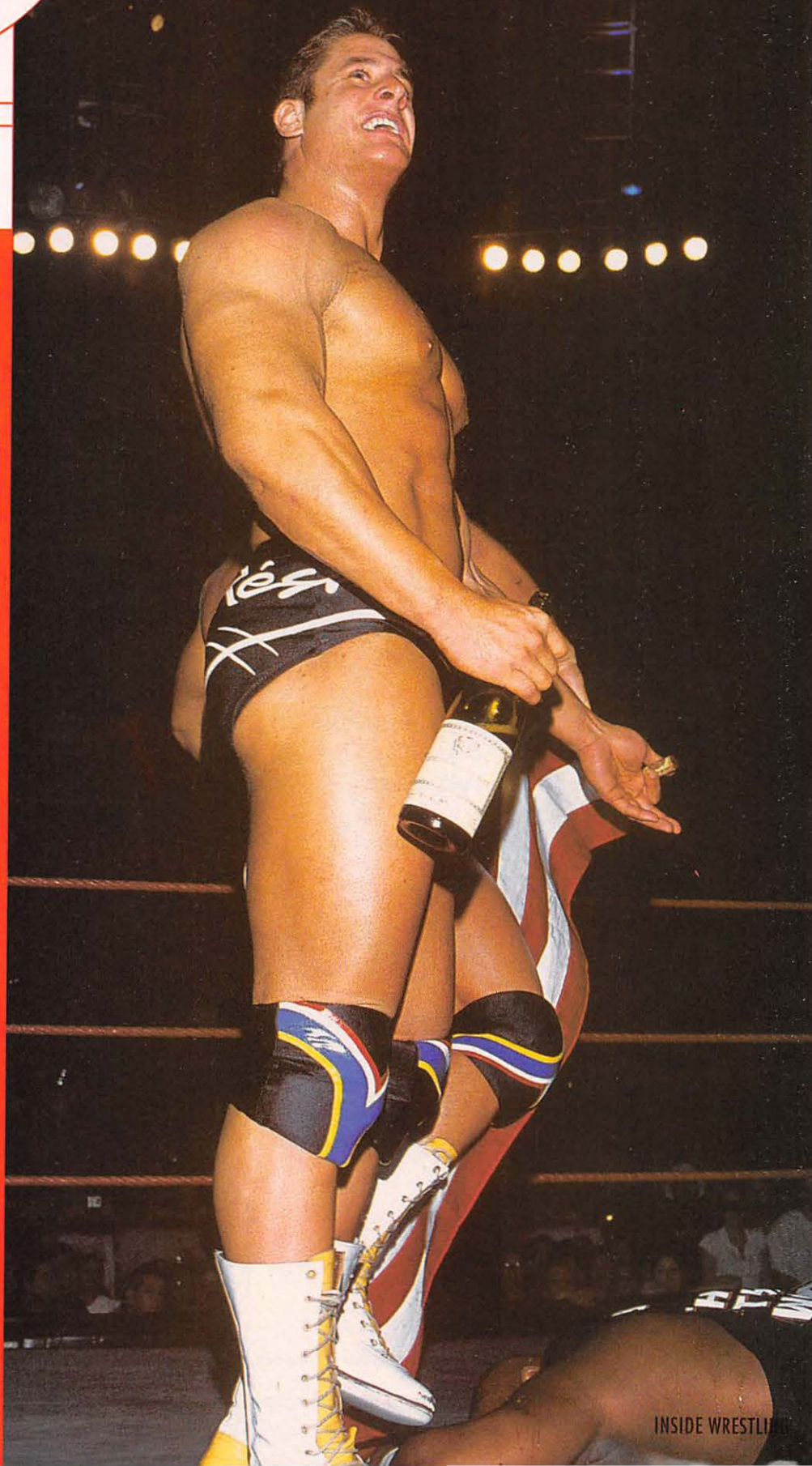
**BIGGEST TEST TO DATE:** He's in the middle of taking it now.

He's going to get every opportunity to prove he can be a major singles player for WWE.

**OUTLOOK FOR 2004:** He hasn't fared well in his feud with John Cena so far, but WWE is high on this youngster's ring skills, his poise, and his charisma. The U.S. title should be his by year's end, and he should be among the most hated men on the Smackdown roster by then, too.

**QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS:** "I hate to put these kind of expectations out there, but there are similarities between Dupree's career and The Rock's. Dupree is arrogant in a way that Rock was early in his WWE career. I think fans could get to a point where they hate Dupree so much that they can't help but like him."

—Editor-in-Chief Dave Lenker





## FRANKIE KAZARIAN

HEIGHT: 6'1"

WEIGHT: 220

HOMETOWN: Yucca Valley, CA

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: It just happened—he captured the vacant NWA-TNA X title by defeating The Amazing Red on March 31

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Integrates elements of Lucha Libre, *puroresu*, and traditional American pro wrestling into a nice repertoire and plan of attack. He has learned a lot during tours of Japan with Zero-One

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE:

He could stand to pace his matches and himself a bit better. He has a lot of tremendous moves in his arsenal, but he doesn't need to fit all of them into every match

PET FINISHER: Wave of the future (twisting faceplant)

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: Growing into the frame of a pro wrestler. Sounds odd, but it was a real challenge for him. He was rail thin at 145 pounds when he began his career. Now he wouldn't look out of place sharing a ring with some of the world's top heavyweights

OUTLOOK FOR 2004: Looks status quo from our perspective. He enjoys traveling all over the independent circuit in the U.S., making the occasional tour of Japan, and competing in TNA. We see no reason for that to change, although he could be a factor in the NWA heavyweight division by the end of 2004

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "Some of the toughest matches I've had over the last year or so have been against Kazarian, and I think he's gotten tougher to beat every time. He always tries to throw some new wrinkles at you."

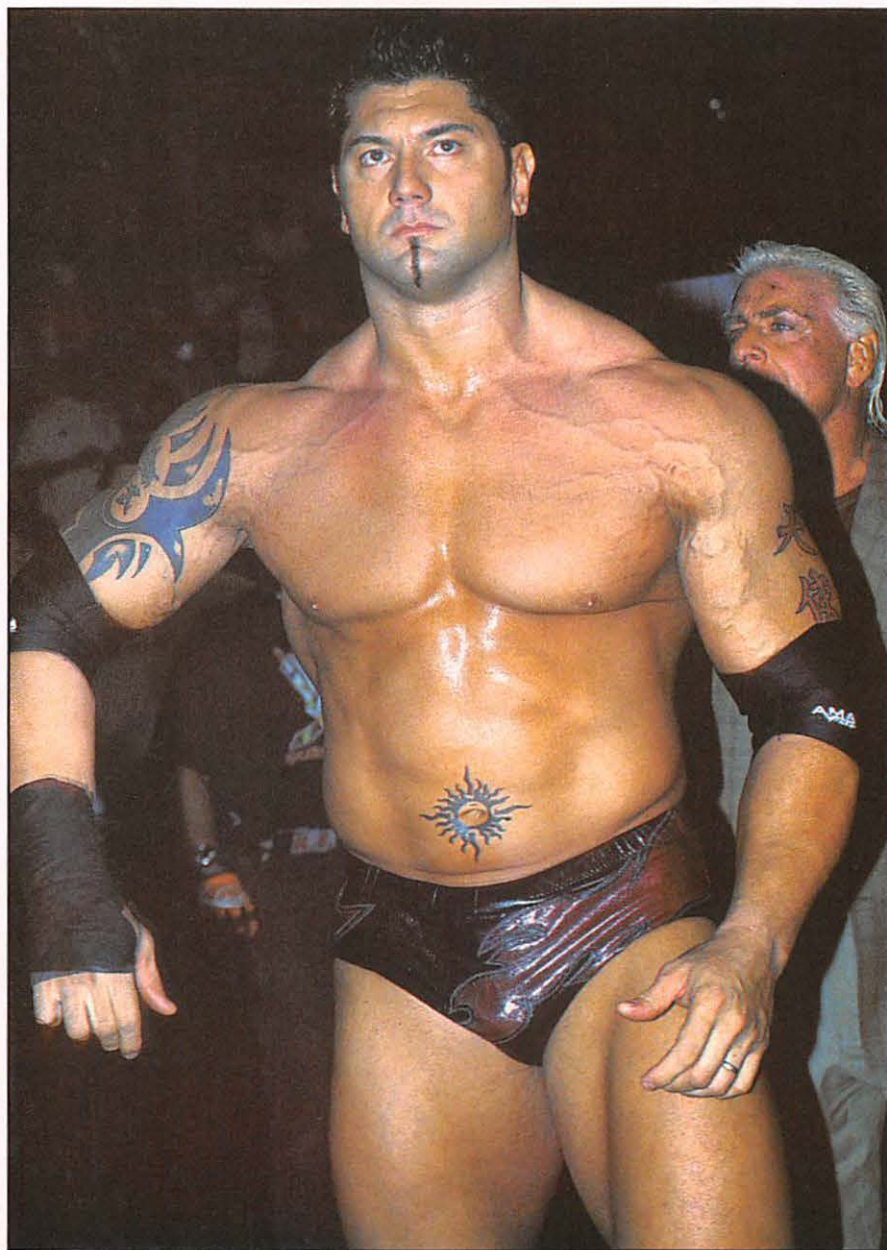
—Chris Sabin





With Dave Lenker

**B**ATISTA IS OVERLOOKED. I don't expect you to agree with me. In fact, I'd expect you to argue vigorously with me about this particular topic. I know what you want to ask: How could a wrestler who is a part of the most influential clique in the sport, a comrade of Triple-H and the tag team partner of Ric Flair, be overlooked? How is it possible?



Even though Ric Flair is standing behind him here, even though Batista is easily the most imposing physical specimen in Evolution, he's the man most likely to get lost in the supergroup. Will he stand for that for long ... or is he already plotting something?

It's simple, really. If I say "Evolution," the first wrestler you think about is Triple-H. He's the group's leader, its most vocal component, and the go-to guy for all important decisions. Heck, if there wasn't a Triple-H, there wouldn't be an Evolution. He's the cog that makes Evolution spin 'round and 'round. Take him out, and Evolution dissolves instantaneously.

Who do you think of second? This answer could go one of two ways: Randy Orton or Flair. I lean toward Orton. He's the group's can't-miss blue-chipper, and he's already feuded with everyone from Mick Foley to Shawn Michaels to Rob Van Dam. WWE has thrown its marketing machine behind him 100 percent, and the promotion continues to force him down our throats. (Remember his rehabilitation updates? I can't remember anyone else who received so much camera time while injured, can you?) Because of this, he has matured quickly. A year ago, he was green. Today, he's a prime contender to move up to Raw's top tier. By this time next year, he'll have already challenged or might be in the process of challenging Triple-H for the group's leadership.

"The Cerebral Assassin" will only be able to hold down this kid for so long.

I think about Flair next. He's the group's old military commander, the salty dog who has seen more wars than the other members have played games of checkers. Even at his age, with a physique that long ago disappeared behind flabby, toot-an skin, he has a presence. At times, he outshines every one of his teammates combined. He hasn't resorted to becoming a parody of his former self, either, something his arch-rival, Hulk Hogan, was wholly unable to stop from happening. When Flair wrestles—he wrestles, gosh darn it. He may be in his mid-



50s and is probably in the ring too much these days, but he refuses to hold anything back when he's wearing the tights. In his mind, he's still the "Nature Boy" of old—and he'll probably hold that opinion of himself until the day he dies. He can outwit, outplay, and outlast nearly every other wrestler put in front of him. He is a survivor of the highest order.

Then, finally, there's Batista. I think of him as the group's muscle, the big man who is called upon whenever there's some wreckin' that needs to be done. But I also view him as that big guy in the background who doesn't say a whole lot, doesn't get in many feuds with anyone on his own, and isn't afforded many chances at individual success. In many ways, he's the group's shadow: good enough and impressive enough to hang out with Helmsley, Orton, and Flair, but not quite respected enough to be allowed to speak for himself and make many of his own decisions.

You'd have a hard time convincing me otherwise. Who is the last wrestler Batista feuded with? When was the last time he cut a promo? Heck, when was his last big televised singles match? If you can answer any of these questions off the top of your head, then maybe I'm wrong—but I don't believe you can answer them.

Batista is Evolution's one-man supporting cast. For a man of his size, he spends far too much of his time trying to look inconspicuous.

It's a hard argument to believe when you first read it, especially when you take a look at him. If you asked 100 people who don't watch wrestling to take a quick scan of all four members of Evolution and then to point out the most intimidating wrestler of the four, I'm pretty sure that Batista would be the wrestler pointed out most—if not all—of the time. There's nothing—absolutely nothing—about him that isn't threat-



We know Batista can handle D-Von Dudley in one-on-one action. What we don't know is how he'd fare against the best competition Raw has to offer night in and night out. The others in Evolution seem to be quietly holding him back.

ening. His muscles, his stare, and his tattoos are the hallmarks of a man who is under constant pressure to restrain himself.

He is built to inspire fear.

For his part, Batista seems to understand his role well. He hasn't bucked the system, looked for a way out, or even asked Triple-H to let the spotlight shine on him for an evening. He seems content to lurk in the shadows, only to strike when his teammates need him to do so.

This mentality, especially in a sport that's so predicated on individual success, is hard to understand. Maybe he believes he's gaining insider knowledge from Triple-H and Flair. Maybe he's biding his time, waiting for the proper moment to strike and unleash his fury. Or maybe he's truly content with his current role.

The only person who knows what Batista is really thinking is Batista, but if I'm Triple-H, Orton, or Flair, I'm doing everything within my power to make sure that the big man is happy. The second he starts becoming unhappy or feeling unappreciated, all hell is going to break loose, and it isn't going to be fun for any of them.

Unless things change, the silent killer might very well turn out to be the group's undoing. □



By Brandi Mankiewicz

*(The opinions expressed in "The Insider" are those of Brandi Mankiewicz alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of anyone else on the staff of this magazine.)*

**E**IGHT FOR EIGHT. Yep, that's my track record for the East Coast Wrestling Association's Super 8 Tournament. I've been to them all, which is a claim that 99 percent of wrestling journalists can't make. I've seen this event develop from a whim to a phenomenon. In the beginning, it was all about who was the best in the ECWA. It wasn't until the third year of the tournament that it truly went national. Each year since, the Super 8 has grown exponentially.



Super 8 night always brings out the best in everyone on the ECWA roster. Japanese Pool Boy even rolled out his best costume yet: Dorothy, complete with stuffed Toto. The regular fans are used to this, but I can just imagine what the visiting Super 8 marks thought.

I can remember fun things from each year that fill my mental scrapbook. Whether it was watching Ace Darling become the first man to rightfully hold the trophy or watching Christopher Daniels hoist it for a second time, it has been all good. Sometimes quirky, but good nonetheless. Little-known fact: I get the trophy every year. *Ha-ha!* Well, it's only to take it to our studio set for the preshow group shot we take every year. But I do get custody of it for a grand total of an hour.

One of my fondest memories is standing next to a young friend of mine named Jeffrey Peterson to watch the 1998 tournament. Jeff was only 16 at the time, but he dreamed of being a wrestler. It was all he ever talked about with anyone who would listen. He had been training with his uncle, ECWA promoter Jim Kettner, as well as Lance (Simon) Diamond and anyone else who would get in a ring with him.

When he was finally allowed to have a match, that skinny little kid had an uncanny ability to connect with a crowd. Luckily, I got to watch him in the Super 8 that very next year, as well as in the following year. I'll never forget Jeffrey's first-round match with Jet Jaguar in 1999, when both guys got hurt. Jet was knocked out during the match, while Jeff knocked the wind out of himself. Afterward, Jeff had a hard time catching his breath as we stood together just outside the building in the cool night air. It was at that time Jeff explained that he was battling a particularly nasty case of bronchitis. Little did either of us know at that moment that it wasn't bronchitis, but cancer that was taking his breath away. He died in November 2002.

There's not much more I can write about Super 8 winner Christopher Daniels that I haven't previously written. Watching him win the tournament for a second time seemed appropriate. While he's not the first to have wrestled multiple times in the tourney, he's quite possibly the only guy who has been the favorite in every tournament in which he participated. He won it previously in 2000, but he damn near won it in 1999 when he faced young upstart Steve Bradley in the finals. Bradley's win catapulted him into WWE developmental hell, while Daniels continued to rise on the independent scene. Bradley's WWE career ended quietly in 2002. Daniels went on to gain more accolades than Bradley ever did.

What always amazes me about the Super 8 isn't the tournament itself anymore. Sure, it's always fun



to watch eight individuals come together and work fluidly as a group, but I expect that each year. It's part of the Super 8 doctrine. I'm more amazed by the regular ECWA roster. These guys bust their asses on every other show, only to get overshadowed by the tournament every year. For the most part, though, they don't seem to mind.

"It doesn't bother me at all," said Mozart Fontaine. "I still had a spot in the tag team summit, so I was on the card. Even if I didn't have a match, I wouldn't have minded it. I just like having the best seat in the house for the tournament."

This year, the regulars were jumbled into a tag team summit battle royal, with the winners to receive a shot at tag team champions The Valedictorians immediately after. Ace Darling and Striker won the summit, but came up just short in the title match.

While the regular ECWA fans that flock to the shows every month were content with seeing their favorites, it was a different experience for the transient Super 8 fans. For anyone there just to see the tournament, it must have been an interesting experience. Most casual fans have *heard* of Mr. Ooh La La, but have never seen him in action. The same can be said for The Japanese Pool Boy, who decided to celebrate this special occasion by dressing like Dorothy from *The Wizard Of Oz* for his match. These two freaks might not be Super 8 material, but their entrances

and antics were well worth the price of admission. I can only imagine how many Internet smarks walked away from the show talking about them rather than the tournament. Of course, there are also the fans that came to the show by way of a bus trip, only to watch The Valedictorians—along with their conniving manager, Carlton P. Hightower—place a "For Sale" sign on the bus during the show.

Then there was J.J. Dillon. The esteemed leader of the legendary Four Horsemen was the master of ceremonies for the tournament. I think I spent more time watching him watch the show than anything else. He sat at the announcers' table taking in every last moment and was reacting just as any other wrestling fan would. Dillon truly enjoyed the night—and not just the tournament matches. His reaction to Japanese Pool Dorothy was priceless. Same goes for almost every other character that paraded past him. Watching the three-time Manager of the Year give respect to these weekend wrestlers with crazy, believable characters was truly a sight to behold.

"It was great to meet Mr. Dillon," Hightower said afterward. "Getting the chance to just stand next to him was a childhood dream fulfilled."

The Super 8 might be about dreams, but the night itself is just as important for those who aren't in the tournament. That is what truly makes it a success. □



J.J. Dillon may be a legendary manager, but he's not above clowning around with the younger managers. E.S. Easton must secretly be happy that he's not Carlton P. Hightower at this moment.



By Liz Hunter

**W**HEN MY GIRLFRIENDS and I sit around and watch wrestling, we often talk about what it must be like to be the "significant others" of the superstars we see on TV. Now this isn't something I think about on a daily basis, mainly because I've become friendly with many of these celebrities and, trust me, they're just as real as you and me. On many of his mainstream talk show appearances, The Rock downplays his hunk image by saying he wakes up in the morning just like everyone else, with his hair pushed to one side and needing a good mouthwash.

Still, that doesn't stop us from fantasizing about these larger-than-life people. Besides, many of them carry their in-ring personae into their private lives, which is always dangerous, but would make them interesting mates nonetheless.

Now that London Publishing has launched *Hot Teens*, a magazine devoted to the likes of Britney Spears, Hilary Duff, and potentially Brooke Hogan, I've been taken back to my own teenage years, when I used to dream about being the girlfriend of Joe Namath, one of the three wrestling Pauls (Paul Christy, Paul Diamond, and Paul DeMarco), Michael Landon, or Tony Dow (Wally Cleaver on *Leave It To Beaver*). Instead, I wound up with Eddie Haskell, *er*, Ellner. But that's a story for another issue.

Those teen dreams were an escape from the Vietnam War and the social unrest of the late-1960s and early-1970s. As a girl, I thought it was more important to know

Frankie Avalon's favorite color than the geopolitical ramifications of more U.S. troops in Southeast Asia. Even when I was burning my bra on the university steps a few years later, I had fleeting thoughts about those innocent dreams and wondered why it was ever necessary to leave them behind. So, when my next-door neighbor, Chi Chi, turns to me and says Eddie Guerrero should have kept his mullet, I think, *This is what life should really be about.*

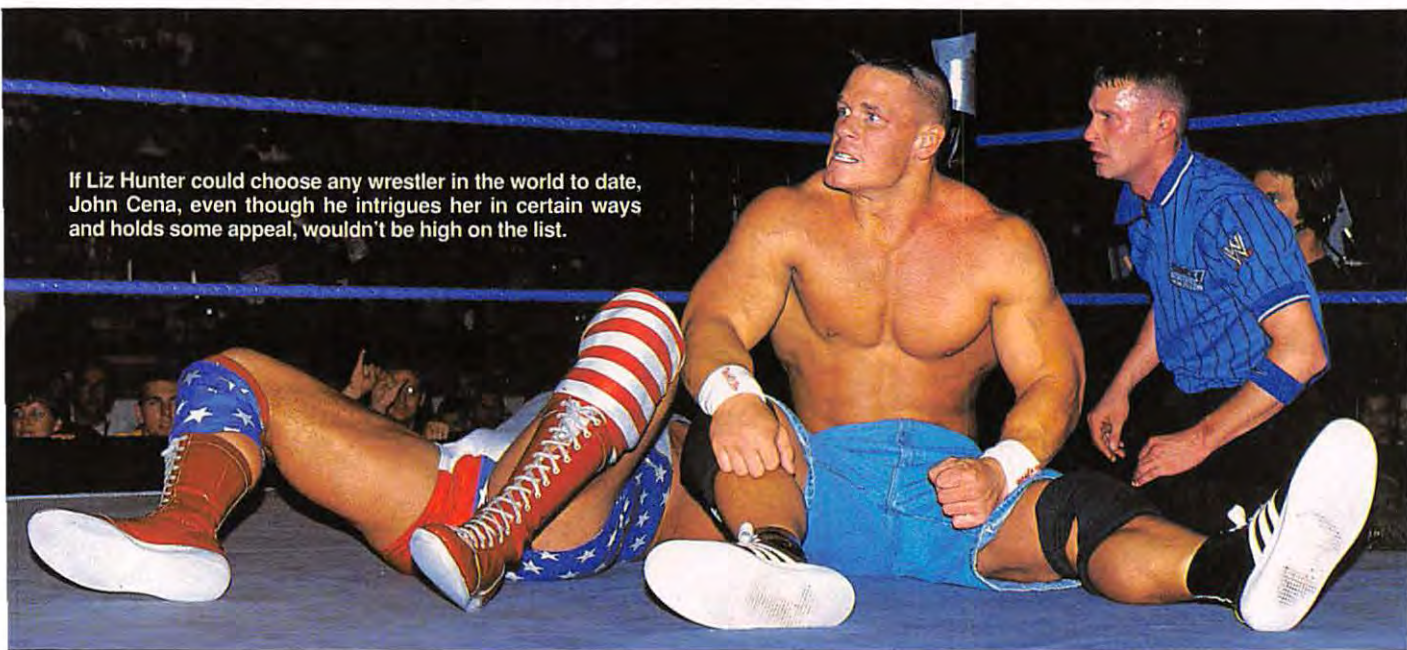
In that frame of mind, I'm going straight ahead with a pure candy column. What would it be like to date our favorite superstars?

**Chris Benoit:** This guy is definitely husband material. He's strong, self-assured, and—as the WWE Raw champion—he wouldn't be home very much to tell me what to do. Benoit is soft-spoken and doesn't suffer from insecurity. I could always trust him to be faithful while on the road. His wife is a lucky Woman.

**John Cena:** I would grow very tired of J.C. rapping on "Thuganomics" and telling me why I should "feel the sting." His childish, homophobic rants would infuriate me. Maybe our generational gap would be too much to overcome. But if I needed a strong man to carry my picket signs back in the late-'70s, I'd want a rebel like Cena on my side.

**Edge:** From his dark Brood character to his goofy team with Christian, Edge is willing to change in order to please his fans, and I bet he'd treat his girlfriend the same way. Edge has more of an edge these days, with the goatee

If Liz Hunter could choose any wrestler in the world to date, John Cena, even though he intrigues her in certain ways and holds some appeal, wouldn't be high on the list.





and hair-trigger temper, but I'm sure he's still a snuggle bunny underneath. I'd like to spend a day at the library with him.

**Shawn Michaels:** He is your friend's older brother, the one who has dated every girl in school. The thrill of the unknown would be irresistible, and I would follow him anywhere—to the back of the school gym or down lovers' lane—for only one night. It would be enough to touch the flame, but just once so I wouldn't get badly burned.

**Eddie Guerrero:** If you're looking for a good time, cruising the streets in Eddie's low rider would be a blast. I'm sure we'd scope out our friends and laugh at them as we drove by. Burritos, cerveza, and loud music—maybe the sounds of Santana (Carlos, not Tito)—would complement the evening. I'd like to be called "Mamacita" just once in my life.

**Kurt Angle:** He'd probably take me to his mother's house, where he'd escort me to his upstairs bedroom and ... show me all his plaques, trophies, and medals sitting on his dressers and hanging on his walls. We would peruse his photo albums and talk about how different he looked with so much hair. At least Kurt would treat me like a lady.

**Jeff Jarrett:** We would jump into his big pickup truck, go to the local diner, and maybe see an action-adventure movie. On a summer night, we might just drive about 20 miles per hour on the backroads, running over little frogs on the road to hear them pop. Now you know why I don't go redneck very often.

**Vince Russo:** He'd take me to an alternative record shop and tell me about bands I couldn't care less about. Then he'd tell me what Vince McMahon is doing wrong in WWE and what he's doing right as a creative influence in NWA-TNA. If I asked him why WWE is making money and TNA isn't, he'd yell and tell me to get out of the car. At least the old Vince Russo would.

**A.J. Styles:** We would go to the park, sit on a bench, and hold hands as we watched the kids play on the swings. Next, we'd go to an ice cream shop and, if it was our fourth or fifth date, we might share a banana split. Afterward, he'd tell me why his family wouldn't allow him to date me anymore. Then I'd go home and cry all weekend.

**Low-Ki:** I would want this guy to talk to me all night. His James Earl Jones voice would mesmerize me. When we



Michael Cole isn't what many women would consider to be a stud, although he has gotten a lot better as Smackdown's top blow-by-blow guy in the last few years. Liz has this strange image of the two of them having a quiet dinner together in her head.

would run out of conversation, I'd ask him to just read the phone book to me. Ki would get tired of this, and he'd ask if I'd like to go to the gym to watch him work out. I'd say sure ... and wonder what was missing.

**Rico:** Do you know that commercial for eharmony.com, the dating service that says, "Marriage is like having a slumber party every night with your best friend"? That would be a night with Rico. We would sit cross-legged on the bed, wearing pajamas and picking out the best fingernail polish for me (or us) to use. Jackie could make the Rice Krispies treats.

**Michael Cole:** I have this image of Michael and me having dinner, while I'm wondering why that blond highlight streak is necessary and thinking he should re-grow his goatee. We would eat in silence, and he wouldn't talk to me in the car, at the movies, or anywhere else. Then I'd realize Jim Ross wasn't speaking into his earpiece.

**Tazz:** Ordinarily, I'd tremble at the thought of walking through Brooklyn's Red Hook section on a Saturday night. After all, Mike Tyson used to be made fun of there. That's how tough these people are. But I would feel completely comfortable on the arm of Tazz, who would explain why it was such a great, though difficult, place to live.

**Marc Loyd:** I can imagine Marc pulling up in his Ford Focus, with extra goop to mousse up his hair, and wearing a skateboarding T-shirt that's about two sizes too small. Then this thirtysomething would want to play pinball with the kids at the arcade. I'd refuse to go out with him again, and that would be the bottom line.

**Jerry Lawler:** I'd have to bring brass knuckles and Mace just to keep this guy off of me. I'd never risk being his queen for the evening. □



**T**HE LAST YEAR has certainly been an explosive one for Kane. He lost his mask in a stipulation match against Triple-H in June, rekindled his obsession with fire, became an absolute terror to the Raw brand, and even challenged for the Raw title. But he has struggled since being humbled by The Undertaker at WrestleMania XX ... Born Glen Jacobs, son of an Air Force serviceman, in Spain, but family eventually settled near St. Louis ... Graduated from Northeast Missouri State with a degree in English ... Wrestled in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Japan early in his career ... Debuted as The Christmas Creature in the USWA in 1994, targeting Jerry Lawler (*"He better watch his mouth on Raw"*) ... Tried out several other personae, most notably Doomsday and Unibomb ... Won the Smoky Mountain tag title (as Unibomb) with

Al Snow in 1995 (*"Hell of a teacher even back then"*) ... Soon the WWF came calling, and Jacobs became Dr. Isaac Yankem, Lawler's evil dentist ... That didn't last, so when the WWF wanted new athletes to play the characters of Razor Ramon and Diesel, Jacobs became the second Diesel ... That gimmick also bombed, and the next time we saw him, he was again under a mask, this time as Kane, the half-brother of The Undertaker who presumably died in a fire when they

were kids ... Not so fast! Kane was alive, and his "father," Paul Bearer kept him hidden away for all those years (*"So it wasn't the typical American family"*) ... After months of violent prodding and interfering in his matches, Kane convinced 'Taker to face him at WrestleMania XIV in 1988 ... UT slew the monster with three brutal tombstone piledrivers (*"But you could sense fear in Undertaker"*) ... Also lost

liances with Chyna, Big Show, Vince McMahon, Hurricane, or Rob Van Dam (*"Some people are better off alone"*) ... Also reconciled several times with Undertaker, but the peace never lasted ... Won Tag Team of the Year honors with X-Pac in 1999, but X-Pac ultimately betrayed him and stole his girlfriend, Tori ... Reignited his feud with Undertaker in mid-2000 and showed that the famous fire that

nearly killed him when he was a kid didn't actually take away his ability to speak clearly ... Remained a fan favorite for much of 2001, and during the WCW invasion, he and 'Taker became the first duo ever to simultaneously hold the WWF and WCW world tag titles (*"No one ever accused Undertaker of being a weak partner"*) ... The year 2002 gave us the ugly Katie Vick-inspired feud in which Triple-H ... Couldn't unseat Triple-H as Raw champion ... Raw co-GM Steve Austin

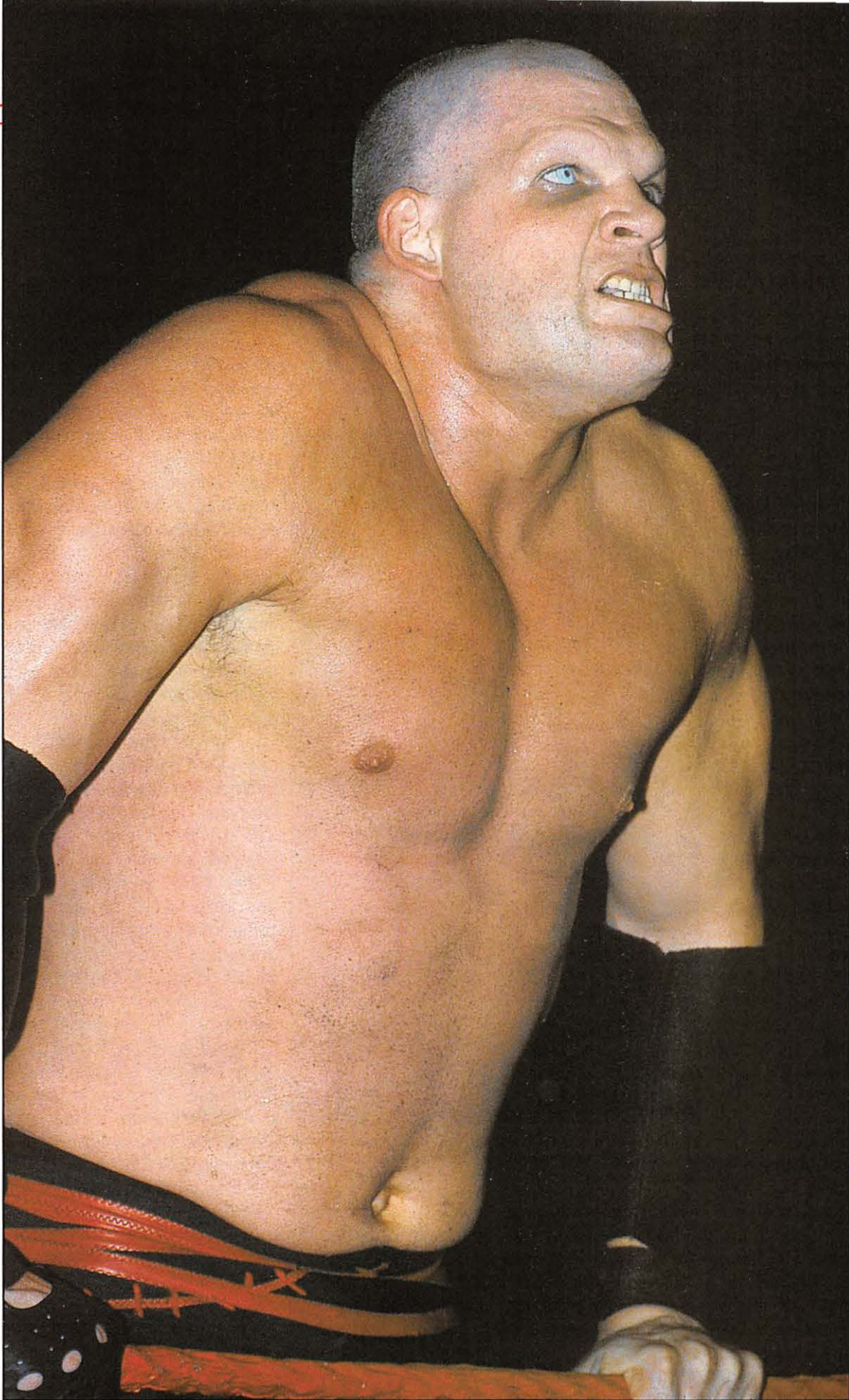


Kane has handed out some serious beatings to mid-carders like Booker T since unmasking last summer, but the burning question surrounding "The Big Red Machine" is can he finally win the Raw title?

an inferno match a month later when 'Taker briefly set his arm ablaze ... Defeated Steve Austin in a first-blood match for the WWF World title at King of the Ring 1998, but lost the title back one night later ... Teamed with Mankind (Mick Foley) to win the WWF World tag title from The New Age Outlaws on July 13, 1998, the first of nine world tag titles he has won (with five partners) since joining WWE ... The Mankind partnership wouldn't last, however ... Neither would future al-

lied to bring out the old fire in Kane last summer and did so, unfortunately ... After losing his mask, Kane set Jim Ross on fire, tombstoned Linda McMahon, and tried to incinerate Shane McMahon (*"Awakening the beast was a big mistake"*) ... Barely got the best of Shane in their feud ... Helped Vince McMahon bury Undertaker alive at Survivor Series 2003, but 'Taker got revenge at WrestleMania XX ... Now Kane has work to do to get back in contention for the Raw title. □





**KANE**

**321**



By Scott Teal

## OX BAKER

Virtually every wrestler in the world thinks he's tough and mean, and then there's Ox Baker. He's always been tough and mean, even now, at 70 years old. He knows it. And everyone who's ever wrestled him or even just been around him knows it.

Even though he still very much looks the part of a pro wrestler, the Waterloo, Iowa, native started out as an exceptional heavyweight *amateur* wrestler on a high school team that at one point won 19 state championships in 20 years and produced several Olympians. He also made the wrestling team at Iowa Teacher's College, but after a disagreement with the coach, the 300-pound Baker threw a punch and soon found himself out of college entirely. It was not until after he completed a stint in the Army as a medic and worked as a butcher for six years that Baker tried his hand at pro wrestling—at age 24, just when he was first getting his driver's license.

"One day I walked into the arena right after the guy who set up the rings got fired," he recalled. "They wanted some jabroni to set the rings up and take coffee and cigarettes to the wrestlers. So I started to work for Pat O'Connor and Bob Geigel. For two years, that's all I did."

But he eventually was trained and began wrestling in Kansas City. "I was so big that whenever I walked into someplace, everyone said, 'Hey, look at the ox.' So I wrestled as The Ox. I wore a big hat, glasses, an Army trench coat, and tennis shoes. They wanted me to portray a stumblebum fresh off of the farm." Soon he began to travel to territories in Tennessee, Florida, Alabama, and elsewhere and changed his name to Ox Baker.

Tragedy struck his life in June 1971. Baker and Rock Rogowski (Ole Anderson) were wrestling Alberto Torres

and "Cowboy" Bob Ellis in Nebraska when they delivered a tremendous beating to Torres. Although in reality, Baker thought Torres was fine, he played up what he had done, saying he hoped Torres would never get out of the hospital. A few days later, Torres died. Baker was told that he probably had nothing to do with it, as Torres suffered a serious injury to his pancreas as a child and the organ had split open again before he died.

Baker would go on to enjoy success in Atlanta under promoter Ray Gunkel (who actually died when he overexerted himself and his heart gave out after a match with Baker), in Indianapolis under Dick the Bruiser, in Toronto under Frank Tunney, in Texas under Paul Boesch and Fritz Von Erich, and in Florida under Eddie Graham. He had thrilling feuds with top fan favorites such as Dusty Rhodes and Ernie Ladd.

After his career inside the ring ended in 1988, Baker spent some training aspiring wrestlers (including Bryan Clark) at his wrestling school. Before his retirement, he did some work as an actor in both TV and on film, even landing a small part in the 1981 John Carpenter favorite *Escape From New York*, which starred Kurt Russell. More recently, he has published a coloring book and recorded a CD.

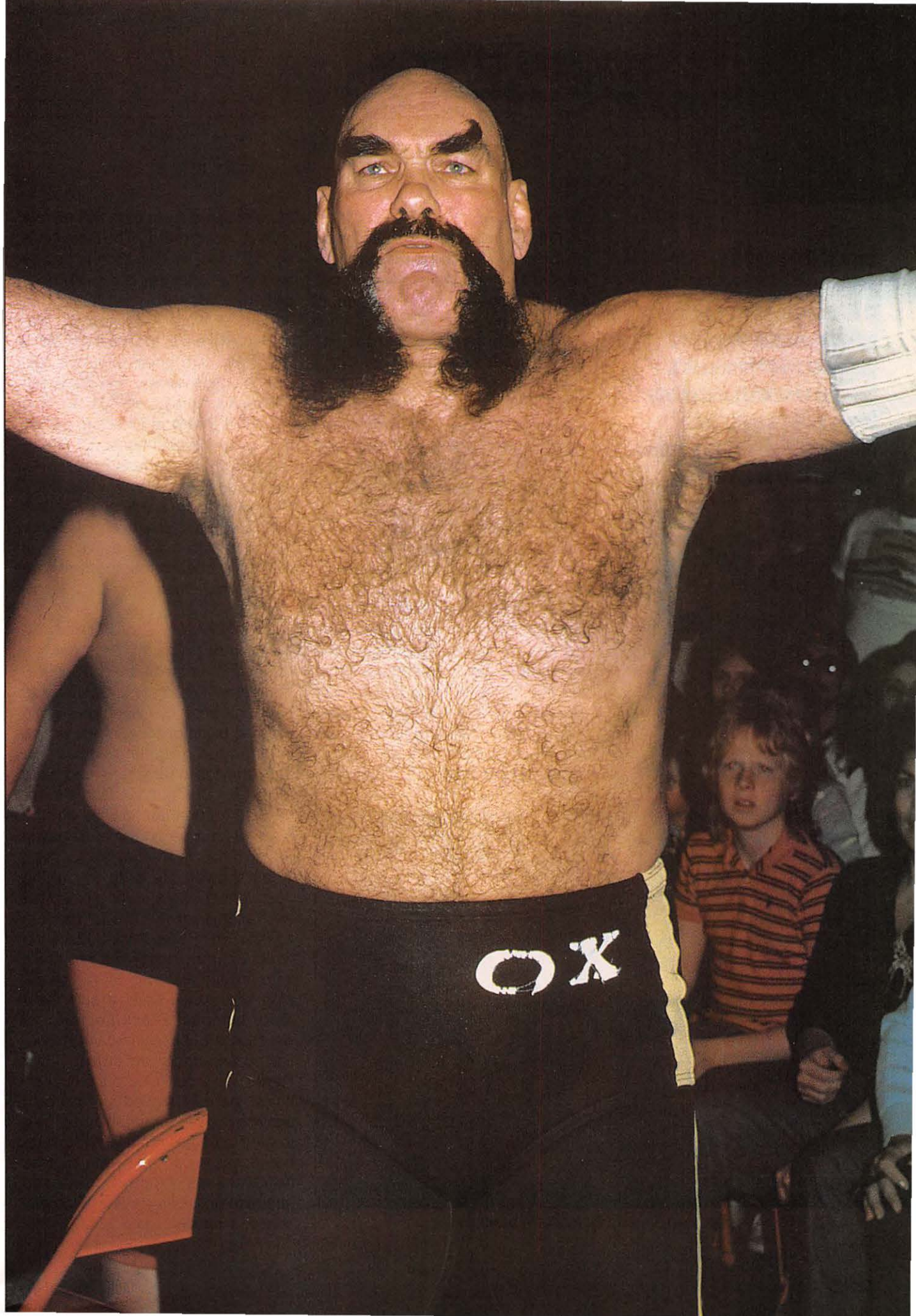
Baker and his wife, Peggy Lynn, currently reside in New England, and he still makes public appearances, often to promote his new cookbook, which, in addition to recipes, features great stories and Ox's memories of old friends such as Andre the Giant, Bruiser Brody, and Jos Leduc.

(Scott Teal publishes the newsletter "Whatever Happened To ...?" He can be reached at P.O. Box 2781, Hendersonville, TN 37077-2781. Web site: [www.1wrestlinglegends.com](http://www.1wrestlinglegends.com).)



Ox Baker was one sadistic son of a gun when he was wrestling. He enjoyed terrorizing opponents (in this case, Ken Patera) using any means necessary.







With Matt Brock

**Harder than nails, veteran wrestling reporter Matt Brock has logged more miles covering wrestling than any other journalist. Every month Matt will travel to the sport's hotbeds, reporting everything he sees without fear or favor**

**NASHVILLE, TN:** Jeff Jarrett has a heck of a scam going on here in TNA. Back in the glory days of the NWA, the champion used to put that belt up on the line three to five days per week. TNA fans are lucky to see Jarrett defend the title twice a month. Instead of defending the belt against the top contenders in NWA-TNA, Jarrett has been showing up in Puerto Rico and other areas. Jarrett claims his ambitious travel schedule makes him a true world champion and shows how willing he is to face the top international competition out there. Fine, but in reality, it just looks like he's running from the top contenders in his own promotion. ¶ Tonight, Raven won a four-way match against Ron Killings, Abyss, and A.J. Styles to earn a chance—get this—to wrestle Chris Harris for a an eventual match against Jarrett for the title. Keep in mind that all four wrestlers—Raven, Killings, Styles, and Abyss—had previously won matches to earn title shots, yet Jarrett still has them jumping through

more hoops to try to earn that elusive championship match. The thing that's so foul about this situation is that by the time a contender eventually does get that coveted match against Jarrett, it's usually tarnished by outside interference, incompetent officiating, and/or a guitar shot or three. The situation stinks, and it's about time Jeff's daddy, Jerry Jarrett, and the NWA Board of Directors put an end to this foolishness. ¶ If you're going to try to get fans to buy your weekly pay-per-views, you should at least give them a chance of getting what they want to see, and that's for Jarrett to stop making a mockery of the NWA title and hiding from deserving challengers.

**WILMINGTON, DE:** Always enjoy taking the drive down I-95 for Jim Kettner's annual Super 8 Tournament. Kettner knows how to give fans what they want, presenting a strong blend of competitive, technically sound grappling with a few over-the-top characters and skits mixed in. Christopher Daniels became the first man to ever win the Super 8 for a second time, defeating Austin Aries in the finals this year. Aries showed me a lot by getting past John Walters in the semis, but he had his work cut out for him against "The Fallen Angel." ¶ Still, the wrestler who impressed me more than anyone else was ECWA champion Mike Krue. Krue is built like a more compact Brock Lesnar and wrestles a submission-based style. He convincingly defeated Ricky Reyes with a guillotine in the quarter-finals and then moved on to a bout against Daniels, the man Krue beat to win the ECWA title back in November. It was a back-and-forth contest, with Krue matching his power and submission skills against Daniels' speed, experience, and aerial tactics.



MIKE KRUE VS. CHRISTOPHER DANIELS



¶Although Krueh does have wins over Daniels under his belt, it wasn't a big surprise when Daniels eked out the victory. Krueh's reaction, however, was a big surprise. He took the microphone and admitted that—on this night at least—Daniels was the better man, and that since Krueh was an honorable champion, he relinquished the ECWA title to Daniels, even though the gold wasn't on the line. ¶That's a display of sportsmanship that's so rare in this game that I'd thought it was extinct. "Chris wrestled a great match and he deserved the belt," Krueh told me later that night in the dressing room area of St. Matthew's Parish Hall. "If I had kept that belt even after losing the match, I wouldn't have been able to look at myself in the mirror. Besides, it will be even sweeter when I beat him the next time."

**HOUSTON, TX:** You won't hear any complaints about the WWE draft lottery out of Shelton Benjamin. Benjamin continued his winning ways over Triple-H by scoring a countout victory here tonight. Moving from Smackdown to Raw has given the former Smackdown tag champion a new beginning, and it's clear he's shooting for the stars. ¶Not all that long ago, Benjamin and Brock Lesnar were the top team in OVW. Most folks took one look at Lesnar and saw him as a superstar in the making. The smartest of wrestling fans realized Benjamin was just as talented as his massive partner; he just wasn't blessed with the size and physique of his University of Minnesota teammate. ¶I'm still not quite convinced that Benjamin has the tools to win the Raw title, but if I was Randy Orton, I'd definitely be keeping my eyes open. Benjamin would make a fantastic Intercontinental champion, and with a pair of wins over Triple-H to his credit,

he was already getting shots at that title over Easter weekend. I met Benjamin after the card for a late-night steak dinner at a restaurant a few miles from the arena. Asked how he felt about working as a singles wrestler for pretty much the first time in his career. ¶"I've been fortunate to have some great partners over the past couple of years, like Brock, Charlie Haas, and Rodney Mack in OVW," Benjamin said. "I always felt I was learning from those guys, and I loved having them around to watch my back. But it's real exciting to get a chance to work against some of the biggest names in the business and let it all hang out. It's a big step, but I think I'm ready." And you'd better believe Evolution knows he's ready, too.

**SAN ANTONIO, TX:** Benjamin looked at a move to Raw as a chance to establish himself against new competition. Booker T looked at moving from Raw to Smackdown as being demoted to the minor leagues. Can't quite say I understand Booker's rationale. If you ask me, the competition on Smackdown is as strong as the competition on Raw. ¶Nevertheless, Booker made it clear from the start that he wasn't happy with the move, but his old partner Rob Van Dam tried to make the best of the situation by signing a match pitting himself and Booker against The Big Show and Charlie Haas. It was obvious that Booker's heart wasn't in the match, and when



BOOKER T

Van Dam was in trouble, Booker simply walked, abandoning his partner. ¶"Look, everybody should know Smackdown is WWE's 'B' team," Booker told me later that night. "I'm not about to go and bust my tail for them if I don't feel like it. Hell, I'm a five-time WCW World champion. I deserve much better than the WWE matchmakers are giving me." ¶Booker may sound bitter, but I suspect he has a plan. With Eddie Guerrero reigning as Smackdown champ, the quickest way for Booker to get a title shot was to turn heel. Booker did well against Eddie in WCW, and he probably feels he can walk through him to finally win a WWE title he covets. But to get a shot at Guerrero, Booker's going to have to go through RVD, and that's going to be quite a bit harder than he realizes. □



# DID PAUL HEYMAN





# QUIT FOR THE REASON WE THINK?

## WE CAN WISH, CAN'T WE



**The evidence is mounting. Paul Heyman walks out of WWE. ECW is being mentioned on WWE television again. The Dudley Boyz attack Rob Van Dam. Will Vince McMahon try to revive the extreme revolution?**

**By Harry Burkett**

**P**AUL HEYMAN KNOWS what you're thinking. Even more importantly, Vince McMahon knows what you're thinking. Yes, you're starting to think it's an extremely good idea.

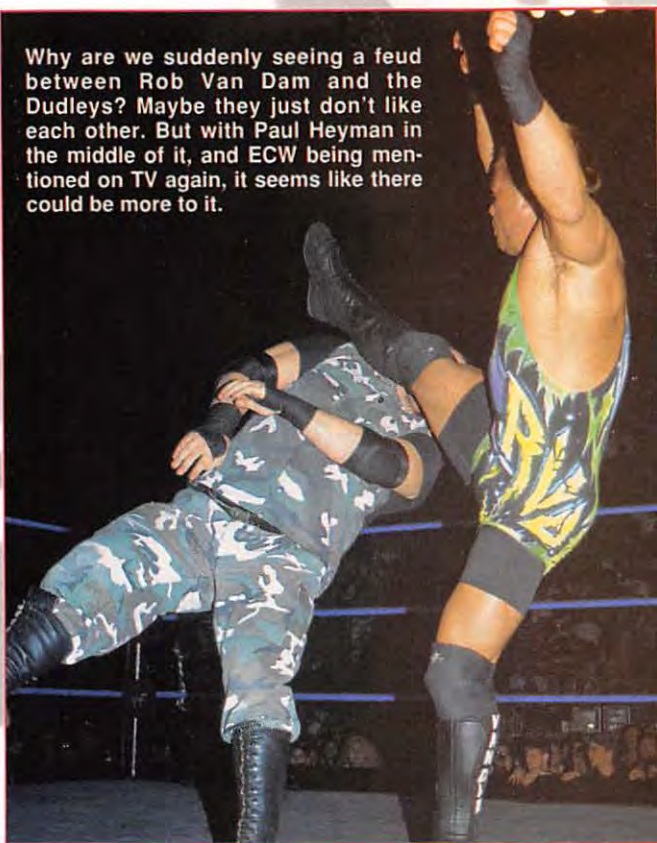
WWE must be planning to launch a third brand to compete with Raw and Smackdown. That brand must be ECW.

"No comment!" yelled Heyman when asked about the possibility recently. "I have nothing to do with—and there are no current plans to resurrect—the entity formerly known as Extreme Championship Wrestling. I will not answer any questions regarding this issue without my attorneys present!"

Such a strong denial only fuels the speculation ... and the savvy Heyman



Why are we suddenly seeing a feud between Rob Van Dam and the Dudleys? Maybe they just don't like each other. But with Paul Heyman in the middle of it, and ECW being mentioned on TV again, it seems like there could be more to it.



realizes that quite well.

The rumors began during the night of the draft lottery, when Raw General Manager Eric Bischoff drew the name of Smackdown GM Paul Heyman. Instead of going to work for Bischoff, Heyman announced he was quitting WWE right there and right then and stormed out of Joe Louis Arena in Detroit. Heyman's on-air role in WWE was apparently over; there was no indication that he had returned to Smackdown's creative team. But sources confirmed he was still under contract.

So what could be in the works? If we consider all the circumstantial evidence, the possibilities are intriguing. A while back, WWE gained ownership of ECW's video library and its trademarks after making a deal with the bankrupt company's creditors. There were quite a few references to ECW at about the time

Heyman seemed to have walked out of WWE for good.

In addition, WWE executives have been exploring ways to freshen the programming lineup. *Confidential*, which had been airing in the 11 p.m. Eastern time slot on Saturday night on Spike TV, averaged a 0.5 rating per show, which was lower than *WWE Excess*, which occupied the same slot at one time. According to sources, Vince McMahon wanted to get away from the behind-the-curtain profiles that expose the business. But the reality is that tell-all interviews with Shawn Michaels and Mick Foley draw better ratings than Stacy Keibler's shopping sprees or Christian flipping pancakes. But *Confidential* is now dead and buried, indirectly replaced by *WWE Experience*, a weekly one-hour wrapup show that airs at 10 a.m. Eastern on Sunday. And *Velocity* has moved from 10 p.m. to 7 p.m. Eastern on Spike. Replacing *Confidential* with ECW would have ensured that that hour became "destination programming," two words that are very tantalizing to TV execs. But maybe McMahon isn't ready to pull the trigger just yet.

While it's conceivable that *Velocity* could provide a relatively strong lead-in for an 8 p.m. ECW show on Saturday night, it is more likely that ECW would serve to boost *Velocity*'s ratings. Or Spike TV might be willing to find another time slot for Smackdown's *Velocity*, perhaps after Raw's *Sunday Night Heat*.

Remember, when McMahon purchased WCW in 2001, one of his tentative plans was to air WCW programming in that two-hour Saturday night time slot. Unfortunately, the network didn't like that idea.

Then consider that two more pay-per-views have been added to WWE's schedule for later in 2004,



The last time we saw ECW revived was three years ago, when an ECW faction joined forces with a WCW faction to form an anti-WWF faction that was squashed within four months. That wasn't really ECW. And we're not sure ECW could ever be truly resurrected.





We haven't seen Tommy Dreamer in a WWE ring (above) in months, though he remains under contract. After a promising start with Raw, Rhyno (below) has been foundering again. Dreamer was the heart, soul, and conscience of ECW. Rhyno is a former World and TV champ. Maybe a new ECW would have spots for both of them.



ostensibly for one Raw PPV and one Smackdown PPV. Or are those two pay-per-view slots being quietly reserved for ECW?

Oh, we're dreaming again. That's exactly what McMahon and Heyman want us to do.

The manipulation continued during the April 20 taping of *Smackdown*. Heyman, after such a dramatic exit only a month earlier, returned to Smackdown to substitute for new General Manager Kurt Angle. He antagonized Rob Van Dam during that broadcast, and went as far as to persuade The Dudley Boyz to turn heel and attack RVD—because he wasn't the wrestler he was when he was part of ECW years ago.

It just so happens that the Dudleys and Van Dam personify ECW more than anyone else currently active. Heyman was trying to instigate a feud between former ECW stars. Why do that ... unless ECW is about to live again?

"You can never go back," said Smackdown commentator Tazz, a former ECW World champion.

"Everything that's successful has to happen at the right time and in the right place. ECW was a phenomenon. It beat the odds because it happened at the right time—in the '90s, when wrestling was so hot—and in Philly, where those crazy fans couldn't get enough of us.

"Right now, WWE is where it's at, it's the major league. Sure, it's nice to dream about how ECW could succeed with Paul Heyman's ideas and Vince McMahon's financial backing. But ECW with a lot of money wouldn't be ECW anymore, would it? ECW was a bunch of tables in a bingo hall, that's what made it special."

But what would a WWE-owned ECW look like? Tazz' insinuation is that ECW would become a slick production with spanking-new rings and a fancy logo. Maybe ECW would have yellow ropes instead of Raw's red ropes and Smackdown's blue ropes. If WWE executive producer Kevin Dunn is also put in charge of production, and if Stephanie McMahon is also the creative supervisor, isn't ECW destined to become a brand that isn't much different from Raw and Smackdown?

After all, Raw and Smackdown have never really attempted to promote two distinct brands of wrestling. For all the talk that Smackdown presented a unique, athletic-based product, which was touted when Eddie Guerrero won that brand's world title, it wasn't long before Raw followed suit with



# ECW: THE SQUARED CIRCLE OF HELL?

Sinister Minister as a backstage interviewer. ECW could be the ultimate punishment for uncooperative superstars. It could be worse than Memphis.

*I am the way into the city of woe.  
I am the way to a forsaken people.  
I am the way into eternal sorrow.  
... Abandon all hope ye who enter here.  
—Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno**

That is the inscription cut into the stone above the gates of Hell, according to Dante's masterpiece, *The Inferno*, which recounts an imaginary journey through the nine circles of the Underworld. Believe it or not, wrestling promoters are not among the "opportunists, gluttons, hoarders, wasters, thieves, and falsifiers" depicted in the epic poem. Nevertheless, Hell is depicted as the dreaded destination for those individuals spurned by righteous societies.

ECW could become the hellhole of WWE. If Vince McMahon goes ahead and launches ECW, he could force it to operate on a shoestring budget and maybe run shows out of a bingo hall. Its stars could be forced to go through flaming tables and barbed wire on a weekly, if not nightly, basis. Imagine The

What if John Cena cuts a foul-mouthed rap on Vince McMahon and Sable again? Vinnie Mac wouldn't tell Cena to go to Hell, he'd tell him to go to ECW. Is Torrie Wilson adopting a prima donna attitude? Maybe a piledriver through a table would take care of that. So Mark Henry doesn't want to get into shape? Maybe he'd like being shoved off a balcony.

If the Hell analogy is too harsh for you, maybe it could be more like a prison sentence. Does Booker T have an attitude problem on Smackdown? General Manager Kurt Angle could sentence him to 30 days in ECW. Is Raw GM Eric Bischoff tired of Edge bucking his authority? A sentence of 10 kendo stick matches in ECW might be in order.

ECW would be comparable to the penalty box in hockey. From minor infractions to outright disciplinary issues, ECW could be the solution.

And there, in the ninth circle of Hell would stand the "king demon," otherwise known as Paul Heyman ... laughing.

—Harry Burkett



Smackdown color analyst Tazz, a former ECW World champ, is skeptical of a potential ECW relaunch. "ECW with a lot of money wouldn't be ECW anymore," he says.

Chris Benoit as its new champion. If ECW succeeds with a more hardcore style, for example, isn't it only a matter of time before Raw and Smackdown copy it? Or, if Van Dam becomes a breakout star of the new brand, won't McMahon hustle him back to Raw or Smackdown again to boost those prime time weeknight ratings?

"It's an idea that is rich with so many possibilities," said WWE analyst Thomas Pilliard. "Unfortunately, I doubt if Vince can pull this off. Although he's hailed as a genius in so many areas, he has consistently shown an inability—or an unwillingness—to put his heart into anything he didn't create. Sometimes, it seems as if he sets these things up for failure.

"Must I list the examples? I have some names for you: Scott Steiner, Bill Goldberg, and, yes, Rob Van Dam. How about paying only \$2.5-million for all of WCW and failing to make a profit from it? The WCW invasion was a total failure. Think of some names from the past: The Road Warriors, Dusty Rhodes, and Rick Steamboat—all of whom were enormous successes in the NWA and didn't make it nearly as big in the WWF. How about McMahon's failure to have a pay-per-view dream match between Hulk Hogan and Ric Flair when both were under contract in the early-1990s? No, I have no confidence in this really happening."

Kevin Reynolds, the former ECW analyst for *INSIDE WRESTLING*, agrees with his colleague's assessment. "Since Vince McMahon would be footing the bill, he would be the final editor," he said. "The idea behind a third brand should be to try something completely experimental, and ECW could provide that opportunity."





McMahon's unwillingness to share power would be his undoing. Imagine this: Let Paul Heyman have ECW, give Eric Bischoff legitimate power over Raw, and have one of the McMahons promote Smackdown. Arrange it so all three general managers have financial incentives to beat out the others. There's your ticket to the next wrestling boom."

With the general manager concept, Vince McMahon has tried to give the illusion that others—including Raw GM Bischoff and current Smackdown GM Kurt Angle—have the ultimate authority in WWE. Perhaps the fascination with the ECW rumor is that, for the first time, McMahon might be willing to give power to someone else or at least be willing to try someone else's concepts.

Meanwhile, Heyman still won't elaborate on his current status. "What Paul Heyman does or does not do is always the talk of the industry," said the former ECW owner. "Do those plans include a certain former entity? Maybe ... maybe not. Soon enough, everyone will know my plans for domination of the sports entertainment universe!"

No one outside of WWE knows whether the ECW rumors have any substance to them. But one thing is for sure: Paul Heyman's ECW is bound to create more excitement than Paul Heyman's Smackdown ... if only in our dreams. □

Heyman often got physically involved in ECW action in the promotion's early days (left). And who can forget when Heyman, The Sandman, and Dreamer had front row tickets to a WWF pay-per-view in 1996 and caused a ruckus (below)? No matter what Paul E. does in this business, he will always be defined by the phenomenon that was Extreme Championship Wrestling.





## RANDY ORTON

**"FOLEY IS JUST A STEPPINGSTONE TO ME"**

**Y**OU WON'T FIND too many people who are ready to sympathize with him, but Randy Orton is under a tremendous amount of pressure to succeed. That's because Orton is one of those rare young athletes whom WWE immediately pegged as "destined for greatness." Fair or unfair, that's the way it is, and Orton seems to embrace the pressure.

One of the reasons for the high expectations is genetic. Orton is the grandson of Bob Orton Sr. and the son of "Cowboy" Bob Orton Jr., two men who made their living wrestling when the sport wasn't nearly as glamorous and lucrative as it is today. Compared to what they had to endure, Randy has had it cushy, which is probably why the youngest Orton feels compelled to achieve not just as much as them, but **more** than them. He can't let them down.

Then there's Orton's association with Evolution. Wrestling alongside Ric Flair and Triple-H has been a boon to his career, but it's also become something of a burden—even if he'll never admit it. Helmsley and Flair expect Orton to show up with his "A" game every night; if he doesn't, he hears about it. It may happen behind closed doors, but he hears about it. At the young age of 24, he's not allowed to fail. Not today. Not tomorrow. Not ever.

In the real world, 24-year-olds are expected to fail, but nobody ever said that wrestling is the real world.

There are also the never-ending comparisons to The Rock, the pro-

motion's other third-generation superstar. Because of them, WWE higher-ups, wrestlers, and even the fans expect more out of Orton than nearly anyone else so new to the WWE roster. He was expected to be an overnight sensation; there was no time for a slow build.

Now you know why Orton is so cocky. Now you know why he comes off so smug and pompous. Now you know why he has set his eyes on virtually every WWE legend competing today. He needs to beat them to feed his ego—and to keep his performance level higher than those lofty expectations.

Contributing Writer Liz Hunter sat down with Orton to discuss the stress that he's facing, his membership in Evolution, and what bugs him about Mick Foley.

***"I'm a perfectionist. I have perfect looks, perfect ability, and, yes, I have perfect friends. If you wanted to create the perfect wrestler, you'd look at me."***

**Q:** Randy, before coming here today, I sat down with esteemed wrestling psychologist Dr. Sidney M. Basil. I talked to him at length to get his thoughts on what makes you tick and on who you are today. I think you'd be interested to hear what he said. Do you mind if I share a couple of his thoughts?

**A:** Hey, you're running the interview, lady, so do what you want.

**Q:** Well, one of the first things he said that is one of the reasons you're so cocky and brash in the ring is because you think you need to be better than anyone else because your father and grandfather enjoyed so much success in the sport. Is there anything to that?

**A:** Of course there's something to that. It doesn't take a genius to figure that out. I'm an Orton, after all, lady. An Orton! That name carries weight in wrestling. It means something, and not only to me, but to Vince McMahon when he hired me and to my partners in Evolution. Triple-H, Ric Flair, Batista ... they know they can count on me. They knew it from the moment I joined them.

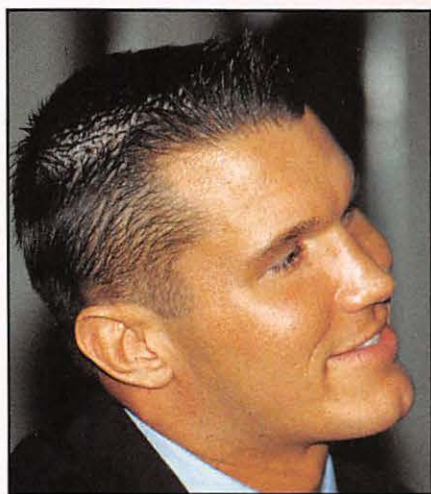
**Q:** So you admit that you push yourself harder because of your family history.

**A:** Yeah, yeah. So what. My grandfather and father prepared me well; they were teaching me about the sport before most other kids I knew had even heard of it. And I'll tell you this: The most important thing they taught me is that you have to want it more than your opponent and more than that guy standing next to you in the locker room. If you don't want it more, they'll jump past you before you realize what happened. They'll









***"Knowing that Ric and Hunter depend on me motivates me. It keeps me on edge, always at the top of my game. And I bet that every other wrestler my age would want Ric Flair and Triple-H depending on them, too."***

take your spot on the card and start cashing checks that should be yours. Having the drive to move up the card using whatever means necessary is absolutely vital in wrestling.

**Q:** You said, "using whatever means necessary." Is that what your grandfather and father taught you?

**A:** You've seen their matches, Hunter, what do you think?

**Q:** Fair enough. You've made your point. But what about Evolution?

**A:** What about Evolution? What kind of stupid question is that?

**Q:** Well, we've already established that your family's history is a stressor ...

**A:** A stressor? You're hanging around that shrink friend of yours too much, lady.

**Q:** I have to imagine that wrestling alongside Triple-H, WWE's most valuable roster member over the past few years, and the legendary Ric Flair every night has added to your stress level. What's it

like wrestling for them?

**A:** You mean "with them," Hunter. I don't wrestle *for* anyone; I wrestle *with* them.

**Q:** Okay, what's it like to wrestle *with* them?

**A:** It's an experience I wouldn't trade for anything. Nothing. I can't imagine wrestling with anyone else. They've taken me under their wing and shown me how to wrestle like a champion.

**Q:** But does wrestling alongside them force you to try to be perfect?

**A:** If you're asking if you think I can allow myself to make mistakes, no, I can't, but wrestling with Evolution has nothing to do with that. In case you haven't noticed, I'm a perfectionist. I have perfect looks, perfect ability, and, yes, I have perfect friends. If you wanted to create the perfect wrestler, you'd look at me. And I put myself into positions that I know are going to help me succeed.

**Q:** But wouldn't you like to wrestle a match or two without having their eyes hawking you from ringside or in the back? You had to have been a little excited when Triple-H's name was picked for Smackdown—before he got traded back to Raw. Could have been

your chance to take over the group.

**A:** I would have been glad to take over. I would've been up for that challenge, no doubt. But we're at our best with Hunter around. Knowing that Ric and Hunter depend on me motivates me. It keeps me on edge, always at the top of my game. And I bet that every other wrestler my age would want Ric Flair and Triple-H depending on them, too. Go poll all those wannabe wrestlers just struggling to make it into WWE and you'll see. I'm where everyone else wants to be, which makes everyone else jealous. My day as a leader will come.

**Q:** But wouldn't you like to be just an ordinary 24-year-old once?

**A:** If you're asking me if I want to be like you and work a boring 9-to-5 job for some menial wage, only to come home to eat some lousy microwave dinner and watch *American Idol* or *The Bachelor*, then hell no. I prefer my limousines, private jets, and every other perk that comes with being a member of Evolution.

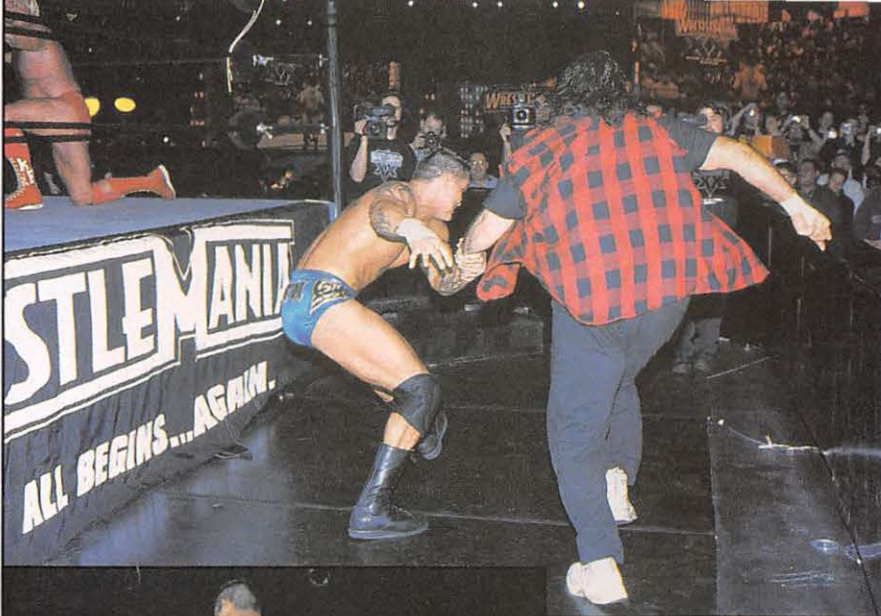
**Q:** Even the perk of added stress?

**A:** Wow, that quack really got you going, didn't he, Hunter? Is this all you have for me? You're starting to waste my time.



We might be able to understand if Orton called Rob Van Dam a steppingstone on his way to greatness. It was RVD whom he beat in December 2003 to win the Intercontinental title.





The problems between Foley and Orton started long before WrestleMania XX. Foley had no intention of competing again before Orton started goading him last year (left). By the time Orton humbled him at 'Mania (above), they seemed obsessed with each other.

hurting on Hunter many times during his career.

A: Well, good for Mick, but that doesn't mean squat today. That was years ago, before he got all comfortable at home sitting on his couch. He's a different man now—a fat, lazy, unathletic chunk of a man.

Q: To tell you the truth, Randy, if you subtract the word "lazy" from that description, you just described the Mick Foley that became a hardcore legend. Maybe he's not so different now.

A: You think you're so brilliant, don't you? Foley is different now. He used to be fearless, but he isn't anymore. He calculates risk instead of recklessly throwing his body around. He's older and slower, too. He keeps trying to find that old hardcore legend inside him somehow, but he just needs to accept that he can't measure up to me anymore.

Q: But why have you been so concerned about him these past couple of months?



***"He's just out there trying to prove that he's still big, bad, tough Mick Foley, when in reality he's nothing more than an out-of-shape children's book author. It's time to move on. Time to evolve."***

A: Because he started to concern himself with me. I was happy enough leaving the old man alone, but no, he had to walk in the ring and ask me to spit in his face. What was I supposed to do, say no? Listen, he picked the fight with me, and you can't tell me otherwise. Ever since then, all I've been doing is proving to him how horrible of a mistake that actually was. I took him out at WrestleMania, one-two-three in the middle of the ring, and still, he came back for more.

Q: I can see that you truly believe what you're saying, so I'll end this interview there. I want to thank you for your time, Randy, and I also wanted to pass on word from Dr. Basil that he's willing to see you free of charge.

A: I'll pass, Liz. Tell him if he wants to get inside anybody's head, he should get inside Foley's. He's the one with the problems. I don't have any. My life just keeps getting better and better. □

Q: Just a few more quick questions. Why the obsession with destroying Mick Foley?

A: You know my thoughts on Foley: The guy is a washed-up hardcore legend who comes back to wrestling every so often because he needs to feel that adrenaline rush, not because he's still capable of competing with guys like me. He's just out there trying to prove that he's still big, bad, tough Mick Foley, when in reality he's nothing more than an out-of-shape children's book author. It's time to move on. Time to evolve. Foley was very good—not great, not elite—at one time. He isn't now. Foley is just a steppingstone to me. A steppingstone to even bigger things. You'll understand what bigger things I'm talking about soon enough.

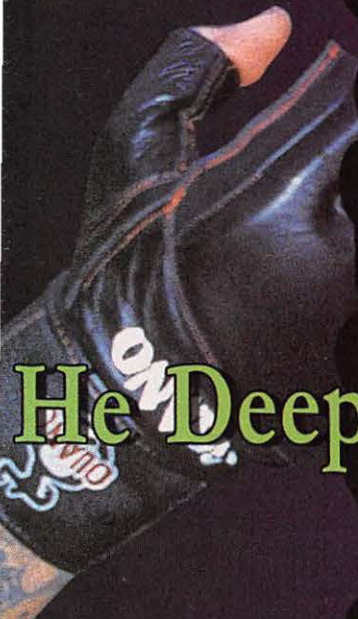
Q: I think if I asked Triple-H the same question, he might respond differently. Mick put a



A close-up, high-contrast photograph of The Undertaker. He is shown from the chest up, leaning forward with his head bowed. His right arm is prominently displayed, covered in intricate, dark blue and black tattoos. He has long, dark hair and a goatee. The background is a dark, textured surface.

# What Undertaker Must Do Before





Crushing Kane at WrestleMania was a great way to start his latest comeback, but “The Dead Man” has missions still to complete before he can close the lid on the casket of his career forever

# THE DEAD MAN'S LAST WILL

He Deep-Sixes His Career

By Jason Langin

**W**HAT DO YOU suppose was going through the mind of The Undertaker as he laced up his boots before stepping into the ring at WrestleMania XX? Surely revenge had to be one thing, given what Kane did to him during his buried alive match with Vince McMahon at last year's Survivor Series. He was probably also concerned about keeping his perfect WrestleMania record intact.

But perhaps more than anything else, The Undertaker wanted to make another major impact (and not just on Kane's face). He wanted to make an impact on the fans, on all the other WWE competitors, and on the company as a whole.

Ric Flair gets a lot of praise for his wrestling legacy. The Rock and Mick Foley both receive many accolades outside the ring for their film and writing endeavors, respectively. Steve Austin is still loved for his





Kane kept closing his eyes and telling Undertaker he wasn't real before they finally locked up at WrestleMania. Oh, he's real all right, and he has a lot of real goals in mind as he winds his career down.



You better believe that Kane is thrilled that he and UT wrestle for different WWE brands. Those who wrestle for the Smackdown brand can't be too happy that "The Dead Man" is back. 'Taker is looking as dominant as ever.

out-of-ring hijinks just as much now as when he was an active competitor. But all of them must pay homage to "The Dead Man" for one very important reason. For 14 illustrious years, The Undertaker has been wreaking havoc in WWE, longer than any other competitor currently on the roster. He arrived in 1990 and has never left to compete elsewhere. When Ted DiBiase presented The Undertaker as his mystery partner at the 1990 Survivor Series, no one could have anticipated the lasting impact the scary-looking phenom would have on the sport.

He revolutionized the industry with his startling persona, eerie interviews, and outrageous ring entrances. He introduced fans to casket matches, inferno matches, the boiler room brawl, buried alive encounters, and "Hell In A Cell." He won four WWE World championships, twice defeating the legendary Hulk Hogan. He always stayed fresh, tweaking his persona whenever the need arose. He evolved from the original dark Undertaker who buried beloved fan favorites to a dark Undertaker who buried notorious evildoers. He then unleashed his Ministry, taking on a more cryptic and macabre personality. And then tossing the dark robes aside completely, The Undertaker donned the biker garb and became the motorcycle-riding, flag-waving "Big Evil."

At WrestleMania XX, The Undertaker came full



## SO... WHAT'S REALLY IN THE URN?

### OUR TOP 10 LIST OF POSSIBILITIES!

With the return of the old Undertaker comes the return of Paul Bearer and the mysterious urn. For years, we've all been wondering about the secret contents of this container. What's inside? Here are our 10 best guesses:

**10. His motorcycle keys.** He was always losing them before bringing the urn back.

**9. His chewing tobacco.** Undertaker prefers Dead Man—er, we mean *Red Man*.

**8. Macaroons.** This whole time, it's just been a fancy cookie jar, and that Undertaker sure loves his sweets!

**7. Dried seeds.** A little-known fact is that Paul Bearer works on the side as a maracas player for salsa parties. You should see him do the lambada!

**6. A ticket from every WrestleMania in which "Big Evil" has participated.** Who says a dead guy can't be sentimental? That's 12 matches, 12 victories.

**5. The cell phone number of Brother Love.** Hey, if 'Taker is really turning old school, you never know!

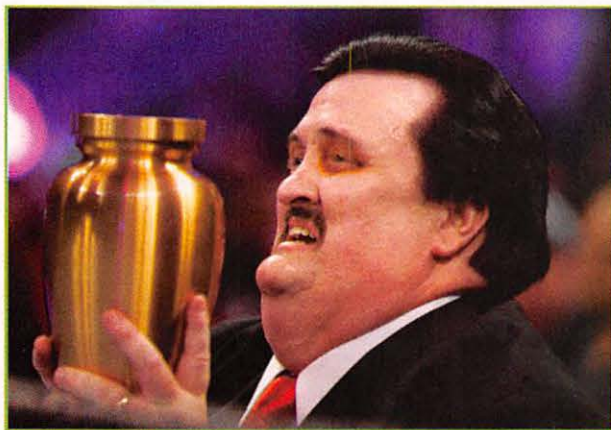
**4. The blood of a chicken, three bat wings, and a lizard's eye.** Or maybe not. Given all the travel that's required of WWE superstars, getting through customs with such an item would probably be tough. Although would you want to frisk "The Dead Man"?

**3. The ashes of his old purple gloves.** To remind him of what he *could* have been wearing for his comeback.

**2. A dry martini.** Shaken, not stirred.

*And our number-one guess for what The Undertaker really keeps in the urn:*

**1. A giant inflatable casket that he uses on the road for naps!**



Tell us what's in there, Paul!

circle with his look, combining his "American Bad Ass" persona with the graveyard getup. But there were more than mere aesthetics that made the former champion "rise" again in his old look.

Brian Hebner was the referee for the Undertaker-Kane encounter, and he said calling the match was one of the greatest moments of his career.

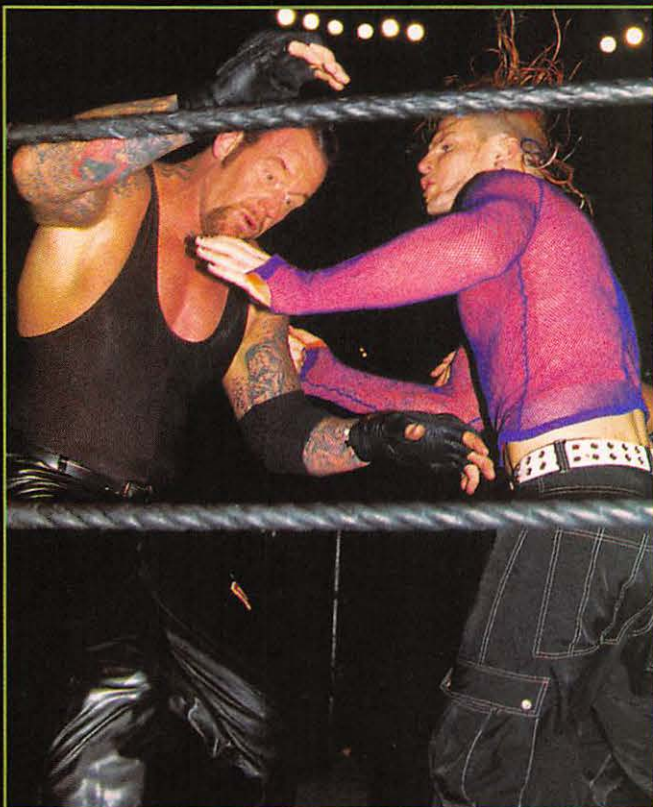
"When The Undertaker's gong went off," Hebner recalled, "the place went nuts. Kane was scared. I was scared! When he stepped into the ring, you could feel that old presence that made so many people fear him so much. It's kind of hard to describe. It was terrifying and exciting at the same time."

Smackdown color man Tazz had a similar take on The Undertaker's comeback.

"I liked the biker thing; it was cool," he said. "But as tough as he was, he still wasn't the old Undertaker. The old Undertaker terrified people. Guys like Jeff Hardy and Maven wouldn't have tried to jump on The Undertaker if he was in the old black robes. And I wouldn't blame 'em. We'll see if guys like that will be so bold now."

Clearly The Undertaker has made a statement to the other WWE superstars that he is back ... and back with a spooky kind of vengeance. But what more does the 42-year-old legend have to prove? What more does he have to accomplish?

Believe it or not, a lot.



Undertaker didn't take the 2002 Royal Rumble seriously enough. He preferred to try to bully the Hardys, Lita, and Maven. Watch out come January 2005!





Kurt Angle used all sorts of shenanigans to prevent Undertaker from beating him for the WWE World title at Survivor Series 2000. He could prove to be a foil for 'Taker as Smackdown GM in 2004.

Despite what you might think about The Undertaker, there is a great deal that he has been unable to accomplish in his 14 years in WWE. Here are some of the major things that remain on his to-do list:

**Win the Royal Rumble.** The 6'9", 304-pounder has never won the annual 30-man spectacular. Despite having participated in the match six times, The Undertaker has never had his hand raised at the end. In fact, in all of his appearances, he has only made it to the final four one time (2003, when he was eliminated by Brock Lesnar at the very end).

This must bother "The Dead Man." Virtually all of the top stars of the current era have won this match at some time. The Undertaker deserves to be on a list that includes Shawn Michaels, Steve Austin, The Rock, Hulk Hogan, Triple-H, Ric Flair, Bret Hart, Brock Lesnar, Chris Benoit, and even Vince McMahon. If named a participant for the 2005 Rumble, Undertaker will most assuredly be more focused than ever before on winning it all.

**Have one more big title run.** The Undertaker certainly has his eyes on the Smackdown championship, and he has made a statement not only by beating Kane, but by annihilating Booker T on the house show circuit since then. Eddie Guerrero is a great champion, but he is far from an invincible one. If Undertaker is able to wrest the title away

from "Latino Heat" (or whoever the next champion might be), he will look to have a dominant run as champion, much like he enjoyed in 1997. Looking at the Smackdown roster, only one man seems like he could hinder The Undertaker's championship hopes. That man is Kurt Angle. In his role as general manager, Angle might try to keep 'Taker out of the title hunt for as long as possible. And because of his position, Angle might very well be able to do it.

**Defeat Brock Lesnar.** With Lesnar trying to become "The Next Big Thing" in the NFL, this item will be hard to check off UT's list. And if (when?) Lesnar does return to the wrestling ranks, will UT still be competing? The Undertaker is certainly hoping he will. Lesnar defeated "The Dead Man" in a "Hell In A Cell" match in 2002, eliminated him from the 2003 Royal Rumble, and defeated him in a biker chain match last fall.

Sure, Lesnar may have been 20 years younger than The Undertaker, but weren't these matches supposed to favor "The Dead Man"? 'Taker participated in the first HIAC match and came up with the idea for the biker chain match. If Lesnar had outwrestled Undertaker in standard bouts, that would have been understandable. But he out-fought The Undertaker. This can't sit well with him. And don't think 'Taker didn't hear the whispers that Lesnar wasn't excited about the



prospect of facing him in a series of matches after WrestleMania because he had already been there and done that several times.

**Really put it on the line at WrestleMania.** If you bet against "The Dead Man" at this year's WrestleMania, you should have saved time and aggravation and flushed your money down the toilet. There was no way Kane was going to take down his big brother in such an electric atmosphere. At

WrestleMania XIX, even against two monsters (Big Show and A-Train), not many analysts thought he'd lose. You'd have to go back to WrestleMania X7 (when Undertaker battled Triple H in a classic brawl) to find a match in which The Undertaker wasn't a clear-cut favorite. This is not to say that 'Taker is being fed pushovers at WWE's premier event, but he could use one more big match to cement his legacy. But who should be his opponent? Many of UT's major rivals are basically gone from the sport (Hogan, Foley, Rock, Austin, Hart). This brings us to the final item ...

### Get Vince McMahon.

While Vinnie Mac may be the true reason "The Dead Man" is walking again, Undertaker has been unable to defeat the WWE chairman in a one-on-one contest. McMahon claims that he "made" The Undertaker just like he "made" so many other superstars. Fine, but The Undertaker is the one who kept his persona fresh for so many years, the man who actually did the wrestling. This is a point that Undertaker needs to prove once and for all.

If he accomplishes nothing else in his career, The Undertaker *must* defeat McMahon in a final showdown. Undertaker can live with not winning another title. He won't rest in peace without a decisive victory over his boss. McMahon will take on the toughest opponents when his manhood is challenged. Perhaps Undertaker needs to do just that to get McMahon in the ring at WrestleMania next year.

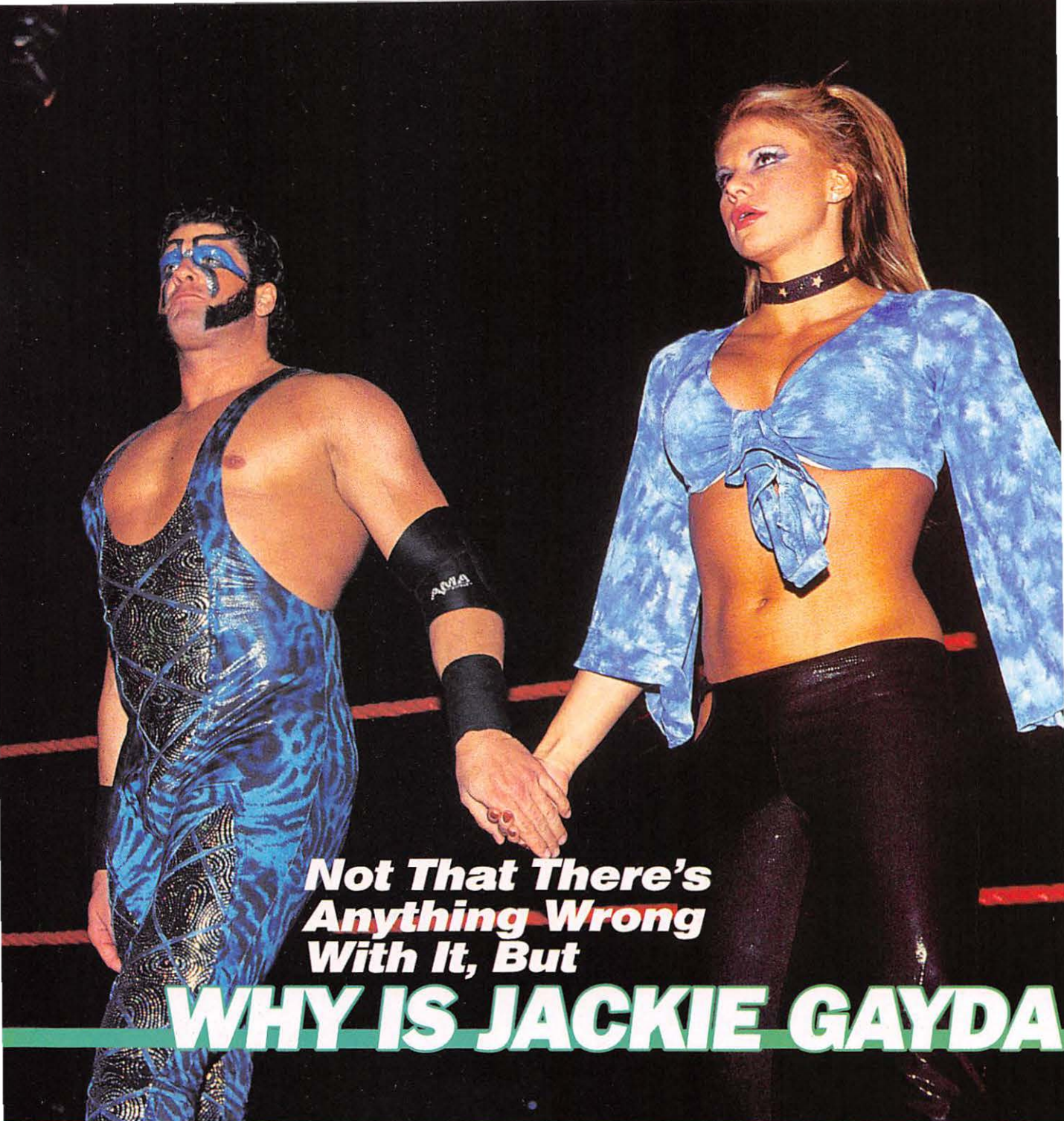
So kind of like Arnold Palmer at the Masters, Undertaker is looking to make his final run at greatness. Does this mean 'Taker is looking to retire soon? Maybe, maybe not. But his days as the "Big Dog" in the yard are numbered. Here's hoping he accomplishes all he can before closing the coffin lid on his career. □



UT has gotten the best of Brock Lesnar many times (above), but a decisive win has always eluded him. That win could be very tough to get before "The Dead Man" retires. But there's still that Vince McMahon fellow for him to pursue (below).







**Not That There's  
Anything Wrong  
With It, But**

## **WHY IS JACKIE GAYDA**

**Most wrestlers would give just about anything to have a woman as striking as Jackie Gayda in their corner. Rico is not like most wrestlers. And this partnership seems most unusual!**

**By Frank Krewda**

**A** MERICANS HAVE LONG been entertained by unlikely partnerships, from the days of Laurel and Hardy through *The Odd Couple* to *Will & Grace*. But others, such as the team of Jackie Gayda and Rico, can baffle more than they entertain.

On one hand, there's Jackie, a voluptuous siren; on the other, Rico, a primping effeminate, whose in-ring character conjures up images of ballerina Ricky Starr and "Exotic" Adrian Street, not ladies man Rick Rude. To the naked eye, Jackie and Rico





Believe it or not, take away the gimmick and the suggestive mannerisms and Rico is an underrated wrestler. It just seems odd that he would be the type to attract such a gorgeous woman.

aren't exactly opposites. But they're a strange fit. So what's the attraction? What does Jackie see in Rico?

From Rico's perspective, having Jackie in his corner presents two distinct advantages. First, Jackie, with her beauty and penchant for flashing Rico's opponents at pivotal stages of a match, provides a perfect distraction. Rico has taken full advantage of Jackie's exhibitionism to score several quick pinfall wins over flabbergasted foes.

Second, it's hard to boo Rico if seeing him emerge from behind the curtain also means seeing Jackie emerge from her outfit. Fans and opponents may not appreciate Rico's "touchy-feely" in-ring comportment, but with Jackie in hand, Rico never has to feel the full sting of the crowd's disdain the second he walks down the ramp. That affords him at least a few extra moments to focus on the task at hand. And in recent months, he has actually become strangely popular.

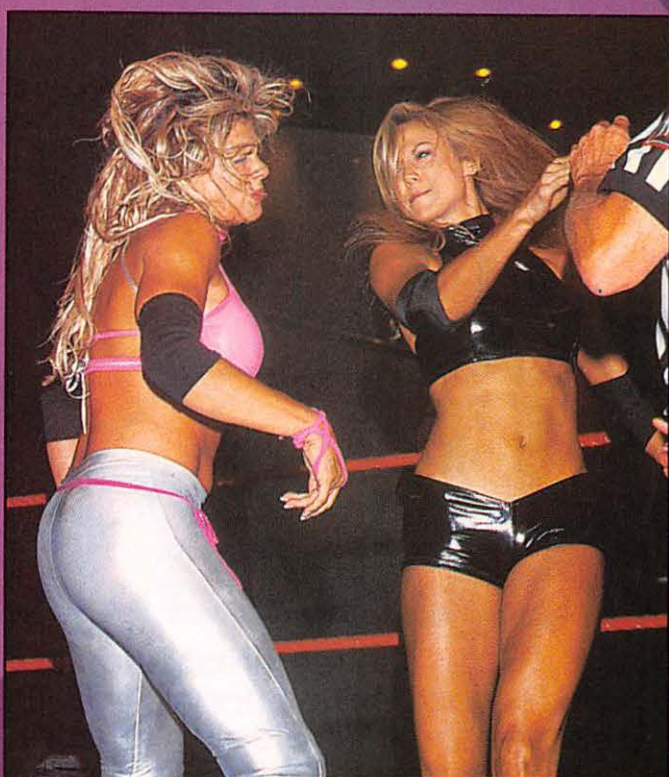
But how does this partnership benefit Jackie? It

## WITH RICO?

certainly hasn't been a boon to her wrestling training. Despite being one of the winners of *Tough Enough 2*, her young career in WWE has been fraught with ups and downs. It's fair to say her critics felt she won a berth into WWE as the sentimental (rather than athletic) favorite of *TE2* trainers (remember the teary interviews and the knee injury?).

Her early in-ring work did nothing to win over skeptics. The low point came in a botched 2002 encounter with Trish Stratus during a mixed tag bout that left the *Raw* crowd booing. Sure, wrestling fans aren't conditioned to expect five-star matches from the divas, but they're slow to boo the ladies unless the circumstances demand it.

In any event, WWE got the message and held



Miss Jackie is certainly better in the ring now than she was at the dreadful start of her WWE career, but a lot of her matches so far have been slapfests with Stacy Keibler. Still, as a valet, she chooses to hang with ... Rico?

Jackie off the show for seasoning. After an extended stint in OVW, she returned at Rico's side, where her involvement has been limited to raucous cheerleading, an occasional slap or kick, and the glimpse of flesh. She rarely gets an opportunity to hone her wrestling skills.

And that might explain exactly why she's with Rico. As a full-fledged WWE diva with visions of *Playboy* in her head, Jackie needs face time on WWE TV. Rico is the vehicle that can get her that exposure—even if it's just a few moments prancing around the ring looking ridiculously hot. Especially if it's just a few moments prancing around the ring looking ridiculously hot. At this point, Jackie's mat skills are secondary to her ability to turn heads.

However, if Jackie is hitching her wagon to Rico's horse, their relationship could soon crumble. On March 22, Rico, who was having his own troubles commanding even mid-card *Raw* matches was traded to Smackdown along with Jackie. A lot of *Velocity* matches seem to be in his immediate future.

Now both partners face an uphill battle for meaningful prime time minutes. Worst of all for Jackie, spending time on *Velocity* might help Rico perfect his game, but it can't make her any sexier than she already is.

It will be interesting to see just how long Jackie remains with Rico now that he's getting exposure on WWE's "B" shows only. Maybe that will give us a better indication of how strong the bond between them is. □



# KISSING BUTT AND TAKING NAMES ... A DAY IN THE LIFE OF **JOHNNY NITRO**

**JOHNNY NITRO** takes great pride in being Eric Bischoff's Raw apprentice. Our reporter took Nitro up on an offer to visit his private office, and she learned more than Nitro was willing to share

By Liz Hunter

**"A**RE YOU incompetent? How did you get this job anyway? Is your last name McMahon?"

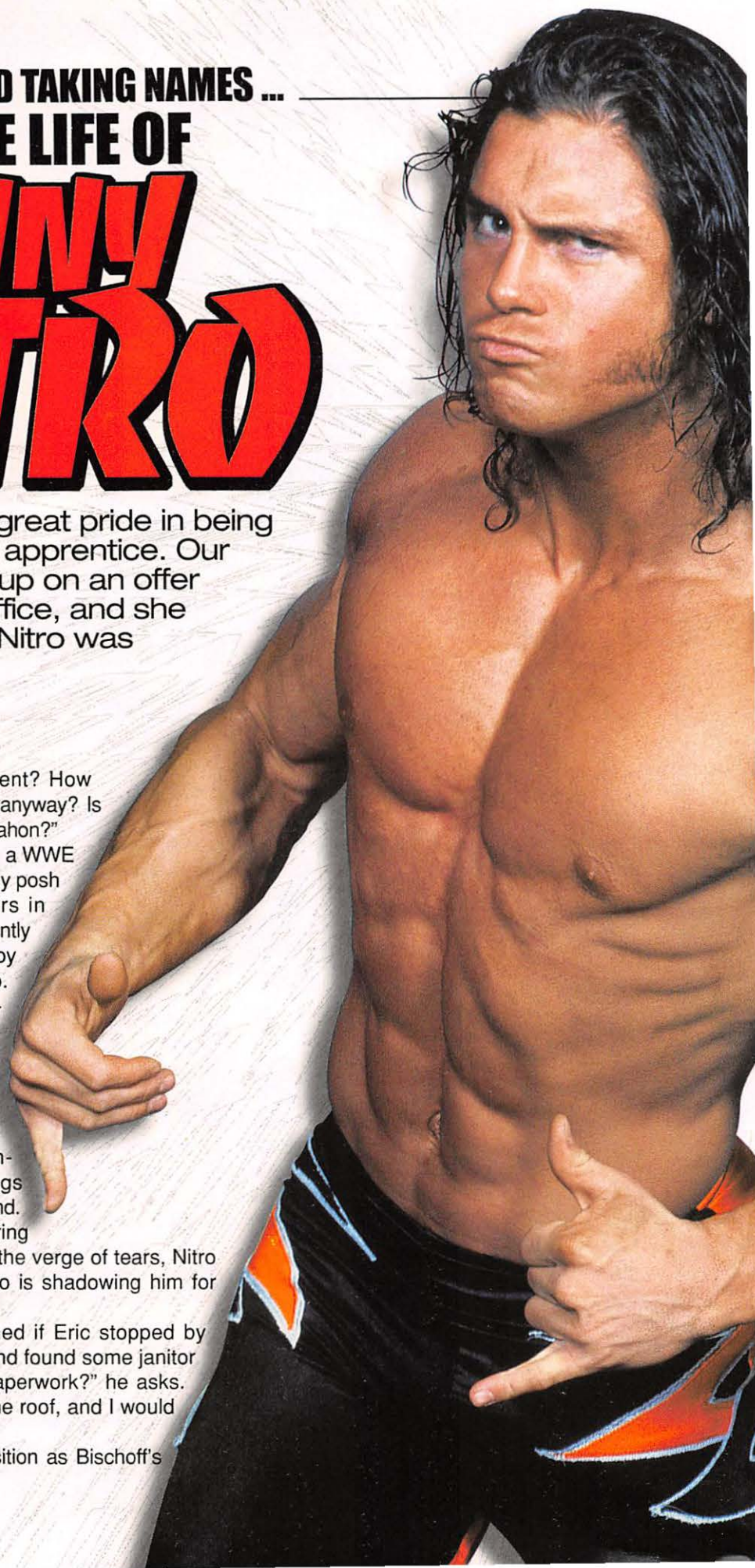
Johnny Nitro is screaming at a WWE secretary inside one of the many posh offices in WWE headquarters in Stamford, Connecticut. Apparently the secretary neglected to copy Nitro on a minor office memo. As Eric Bischoff's personal apprentice, Nitro is adamant that he be made aware of *any* and *all* WWE notices, regardless of how important they might or might not be.

This particular memo concerned routine office cleanings taking place over Easter weekend.

Once he finishes his blistering tirade and the secretary is on the verge of tears, Nitro turns back to the reporter who is shadowing him for the afternoon.

"What would have happened if Eric stopped by the office on Easter Sunday and found some janitor going through his personal paperwork?" he asks. "Mr. Bischoff would have hit the roof, and I would end up in hot water."

Nitro certainly takes his position as Bischoff's





apprentice seriously. He stalks through the corridors of the building like a man who has had a little too much caffeine. The reporter almost has to jog to keep pace.

"My position is rather complex," Nitro says without bothering to turn and see if the reporter is keeping up. "You might think all I do is answer to Mr. Bischoff, but there's much more to my job than that. It's my duty to ensure that all aspects of Raw operations run smoothly, from talent relations to TV production, merchandise to scheduling. In fact, other than Mr. Bischoff, I'm probably the most important person behind the scenes."

Nitro makes a series of right turns through various corridors. He passes executive offices, conferences rooms, and lounge areas, but he doesn't slow down. Presumably they are headed to his office, but the reporter can't help but note that they have circled the floor twice and have yet to arrive at the destination. In retrospect, it did seem odd that Nitro asked to meet the reporter in a parking garage rather than in his office.

"Producing a live weekly TV show is a lot of work, especially when you're dealing with prima donnas like Shawn Michaels, Chris Benoit, and Mick Foley every week," Nitro continues. "Those guys may look like real tough guys on TV, but the fact of the matter is that they respect my authority. You've just got to show people like that who's boss and they eventually fall in line."

It seems hard to believe any WWE superstar would respect the authority of a man who got his foot in the WWE door by winning a reality show, as Nitro did when he (then going by his real name, John Hennigan) won the *Tough Enough III* competition along with Matt Cappotelli. Seeing how important and comprehensive his position appears to be, the reporter asks Nitro how he is qualified to oversee a sprawling, multimillion-dollar wrestling company.

"I learned everything I need to know from Mr. Bischoff," Hennigan—er, Nitro—quickly replies. "Mr. Bischoff blazed new trails in sports entertainment production, presentation, and marketing. Spending two hours with him is like getting an advanced degree in wrestling promotions. That's how brilliant he is. He's taught me a lot, and people better think twice before



Hennigan—we mean Nitro—has actually shown a lot of promise as a wrestler. Sooner or later, he's going to have to get in the ring with some angry WWE stars.

they even consider disrespecting my authority."

Nitro and the reporter pass by the secretary Nitro had browbeaten a few minutes earlier. She now has a smug look on her face.

"Mr. Nitro, Mr. Bischoff called for you. Apparently he wants to know where you are with his coffee."

Nitro's eyes go as wide as saucers as he hastily ushers the reporter to the elevator. He shoves a business card in the reporter's hand and excuses himself.

When the reporter retreats to the lobby, a quick scan of the WWE corporate directory confirms her suspicions. Johnny Nitro doesn't have an office inside WWE headquarters. Neither does John Hennigan. □



Since becoming Eric Bischoff's apprentice, Johnny Nitro hasn't had much time to sign autographs for fans. His time is too important to deal with such petty matters. Or so he would like us to believe.



**S**YLVESTER TERKAY HAD the credentials that left WWE talent scouts salivating. A former NCAA wrestling champion, his only college loss was to a fellow by the name of Kurt Angle. The Pittsburgh native stood 6'6" and weighed in at 300 well-muscled pounds. If things had worked out just a bit differently, Terkay could have been another Brock Lesnar.

But that just didn't happen. After training under Rick Bassman in UPW, Terkay signed a developmental deal with WWE and was assigned to Ohio Valley Wrestling. Unfortunately for Terkay, the WWE talent department opted to release him from his developmental deal a few years ago. That type of experience might sour some wrestlers on the business and make them consider hanging up the boots and finding a new line of work. For Terkay, it only strengthened his resolve. He wanted to prove to WWE—and to himself—that he could succeed in wrestling.

Terkay got a chance to start anew in Japan's Zero-One promotion. He adopted the name Predator and quickly became one of Japan's top imports.

In a battle of the behemoths to rival Godzilla vs. Rodan, Predator squared off against Nathan Jones in a steel cage match on December 15, 2002, in Tokyo. For Predator, it was a shot at redemption. He wanted nothing more than to humiliate Jones, who would later become one of WWE's top prospects. Predator lit into Jones, frustrating the mammoth Australian with a smooth blend of takedowns, power moves, and surprising agility. The WWE cast-off scored a decisive pinfall over Jones that night.

If WWE had any doubts about Predator's star power, those were erased when the viewers of Japan's Samurai TV—which features  *puroresu*  and shootfighting—voted him the most popular American wrestler in Japan. Japanese wrestling fans are known for being very discerning, particularly when it comes to foreign wrestlers. For a wrestler with barely five years of experience to receive such an honor is quite an accomplishment.

Predator defeated Steve Corino to win his first Zero-One U.S. championship in July 2003 and won the title again with a win over Mike Knox back in September. His dominance is not limited to Zero-One, either. Predator has continued to compete stateside in UPW and recently squared off against former WWE Intercontinental champion Ken Shamrock on a show that featured Scott Hall, Kevin Nash, and Christopher Daniels. He also made a big impression on New Year's Eve, throttling Brazil's Mauricio Da Silva, a jiu jitsu expert, in a shootfight that was televised nationally in



Manhandling a man as tough as Ken Shamrock is not easy to do (above left and above right). But The Predator showed the ability to do it at a recent UPW show. He's doing that kind of thing in Japan, too. And to think WWE didn't want him. Strange.

**Despite an impressive list of credentials, WWE released Sylvester Terkay from his developmental contract. A new name and a change of scenery did him a world of good—and WWE's loss has become Japan's gain**

# THE BIG

## Predator Is Preying On Japan

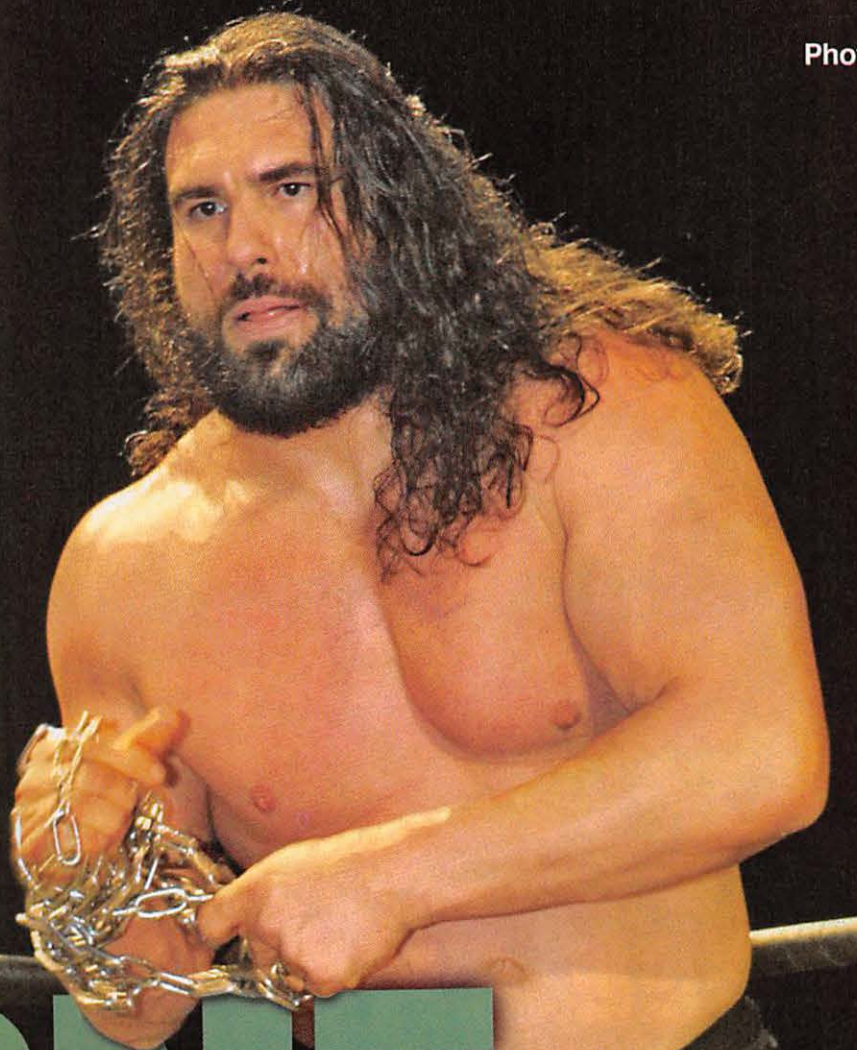
Japan and viewed live by about 30,000 inside the Nagoya Dome. Oh, and he did it in all of 13 seconds, by delivering four vicious blows to Da Silva's face.

Predator has since signed a deal with Japanese shootfighting company K-1. Not too shabby for a guy WWE decided couldn't cut it. Predator maintains he doesn't hold a grudge against WWE, though.

"Maybe I wasn't ready then," he said in a phone interview. "I'm sure they had their reasons for letting me go, but I thought they were wrong then and I think they were wrong now. But I wasn't going to go cry in my beer about it. You have to be prepared for anything in this life, including the disappointments. The way to determine a man's character is to see how he handles those disappointments." □



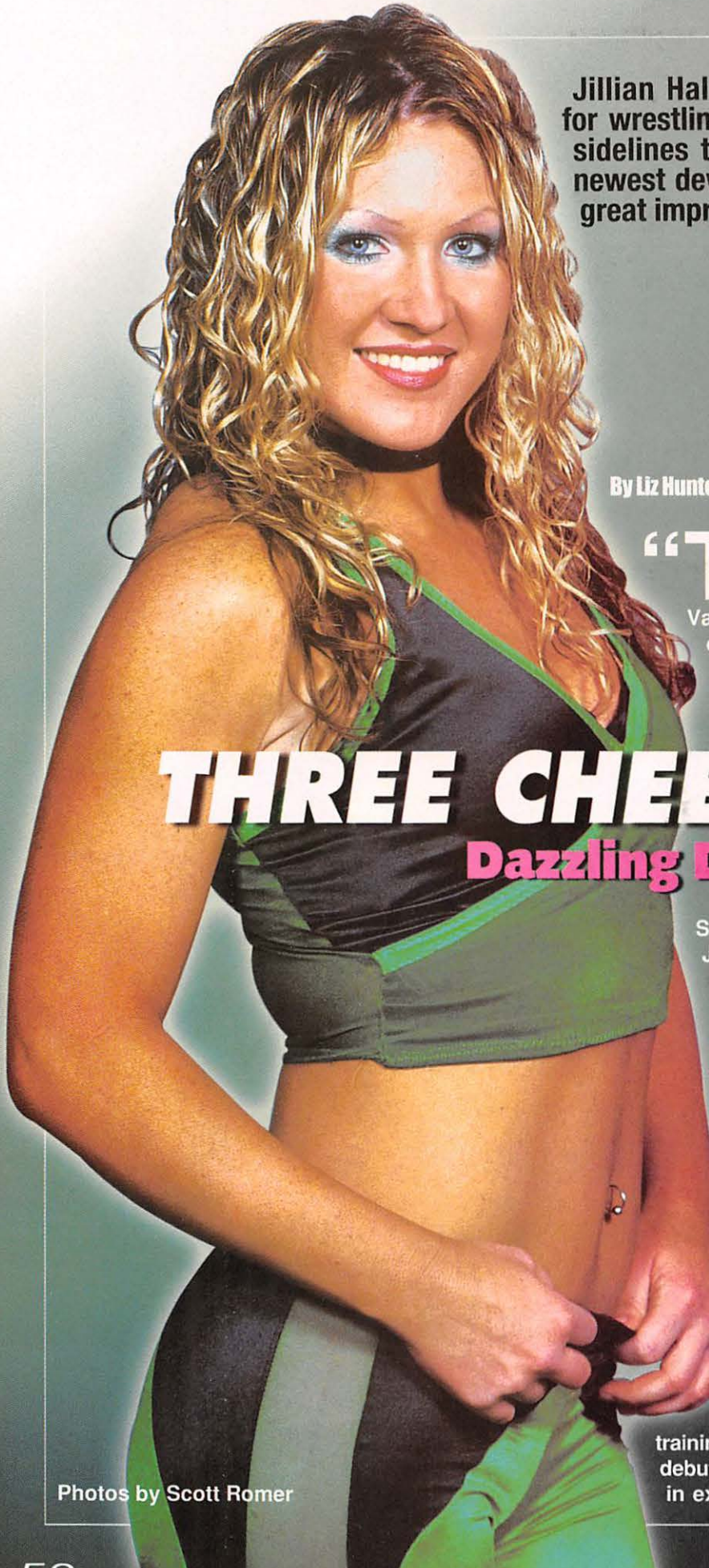
Photos by Jan Sanders



# ONE

**WWE LET GET AWAY**





Jillian Hall has traded her pom-poms for wrestling boots and moved from the sidelines to the squared circle. WWE's newest developmental diva is making a great impression in OVW

By Liz Hunter

**“TERMINALLY CUTE.”**

Those are the words used to describe Jillian Hall on the Ohio Valley Wrestling Web site, and truer ones might never have been written.

Hall doesn't quite fit the prototype of your typical WWE diva.

## **THREE CHEERS FOR** **Dazzling Diva Is Rallying**

She's not a powerhouse like Jazz or Jacquelyn, or a former fitness model like Victoria or Trish Stratus. Instead, the 20-year-old still has the baby face of a girl too young for a driver's permit. But don't let Hall's youthful looks and ever-present smile fool you. The former Kentucky state high school cheerleading champion is developing into a force in OVW and doing so quickly.

During the early-1990s, Hall was captivated by the flashy in-ring exploits of Shawn Michaels, Curt Hennig, and Rick Martel, and was inspired to stop rooting others on and try her hand at wrestling herself after high school. She began training at the age of 18 and made her pro debut shortly thereafter. What Hall lacked in experience, she more than made up

Photos by Scott Romer



for in enthusiasm and willingness to learn.

It was that drive that brought her to the attention of promoter Jim Cornette and the personnel department in OVW.

"Jillian is a natural performer with real charisma," Cornette said. "She's also a heck of an athlete, having been a cheerleader and a gymnast. But most importantly, she's a tough chick. She'll roll with the punches and never complain. Quite frankly, that's pretty rare in the ex-cheerleaders I've met."

While the number of cheerleaders Cornette has met might be disputable, his assessment of Hall appears to be accurate. Her first true test occurred when Hall feuded with former WWE women's champion Ivory last year. While Ivory certainly had the advantage in experience and technical knowledge, Hall proved to be resilient and determined. She also showed a surprising pro wrestling aptitude by finding openings and surprising Ivory with snapmares, dropkicks, and slams.

Ivory may not have cared for the bubbly Hall per-



Gail Kim and Passion seemed a little stunned by the power that Jillian Hall packed into a double-clothesline at a recent OVW event. This 20-year-old former cheerleader has already signed a WWE developmental deal and could be in WWE soon.

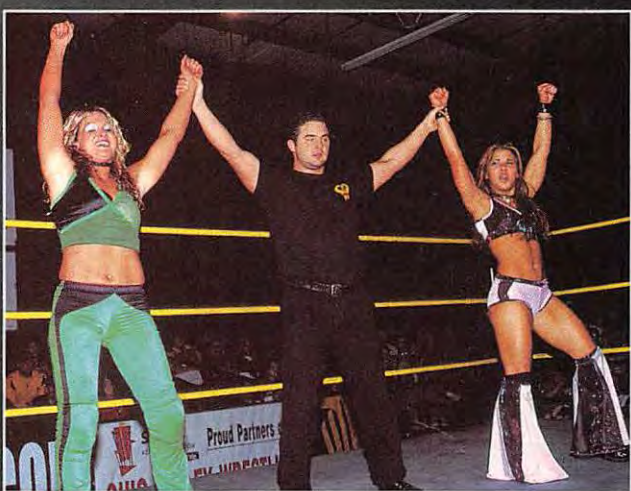
With just two years of experience on her resume, Hall has one of the most coveted deals in wrestling.

But a developmental deal isn't a free ride to WWE glory, a lesson that several WWE hopefuls have learned the hard way recently. But rather than

# Jillian Hall!

## OVW Fans—And WWE Has Noticed

sonally, but she recognized talent when she saw it. She gave her assessment to the WWE talent department. It responded by handing Hall a developmental contract this past March.



Hall and Alexis Laree celebrate their upset win over Kim and Passion. Hall might be a little intimidated by the WWE divas she has already faced, but she doesn't show it at least.

brag about what she has accomplished in such a short time and at such a young age, Hall is more committed than ever to improving and making the most of her opportunity.


"I'm not going to take anything for granted," Hall said. "It is an absolute honor just to be considered for a spot in WWE, and I'm going to bust my butt to make the most of this opportunity."

Hall made good on her word on March 30 when she teamed with fellow WWE developmental diva Alexis Laree to defeat Gail Kim and Passion in Louisville. Again, Hall held her own against a former WWE women's champion and earned rave reviews from the fans in attendance.

"Jillian sure is a spunky one," Cornette said. "Knowing her, she's probably a little in awe of women like Ivory and Gail Kim, but she'll never let them know it. Once that bell rings, she handles herself like a veteran. And the way she competes and rallies the fans reminds me of a young Ricky Morton. I think Jillian could really be something special."

So does the WWE talent department. □





Sakoda and Akio were proud to join Tajiri (opposite page) in WWE and pledged to help him become the most dominant cruiserweight in WWE history. Then he lost the cruiser title ... and was drafted by Raw. So much for those plans.

When Tajiri was drafted by Raw, his hired guns, **Akio** and **Sakoda**, were left on their own. The Japanese gangsters are taking out their frustrations on anyone they can ... and becoming one of the least popular teams on Smackdown

# SMACKDOWN SPOILERS!

## **Akio & Sakoda**

**Separate The Contenders From The Pretenders**

By Dave Lenker

**W**HAT happens when your *raison d'être* vanishes overnight?

Consider Akio and Sakoda. The Japanese pair with reputed ties to the Yakuza, or Japanese mafia, came to Smackdown as Tajiri's hired guns. Their entire purpose was to protect the then-cruiserweight champion and ensure that the title belt remained around his waist for as long as possible.

Unfortunately, Akio and Sakoda were unable to deliver on their promised protection, and Tajiri dropped the gold to Rey Misterio Jr. However, they were prepared to make up for their lapse by helping Tajiri regain the title, regardless of who the champion happened to be.

Then the draft lottery happened. Just like that, Tajiri

was sent packing to Raw—and Akio and Sakoda were left wondering about their future. Making matters worse, their English is weak. Without a manager or mouthpiece, their prospects as a tag team didn't look good.

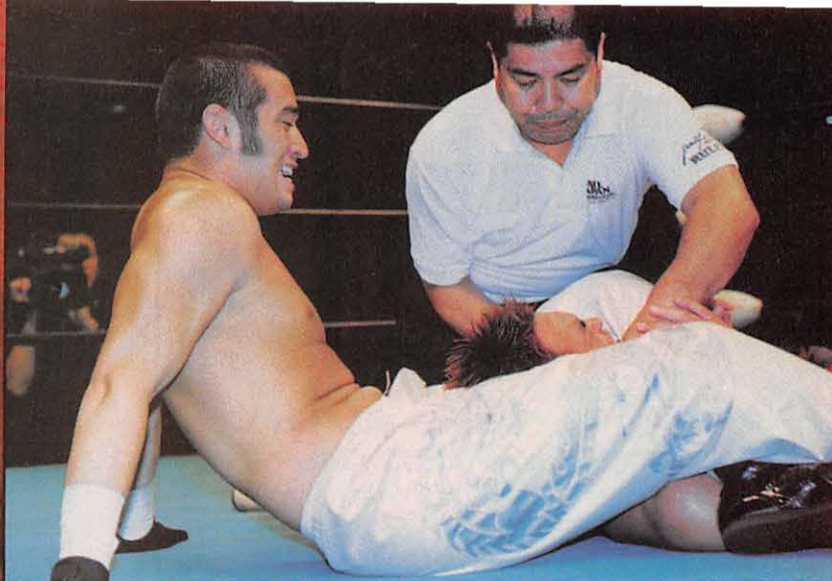
But that didn't mean Akio and Sakoda were going to give up. Just ask the Dudleys.

On a recent edition of *Smackdown*, Sakoda overpowered Buh Buh Ray Dudley, grinding him into the canvas with methodical kicks, strikes, and nerveholds. Akio complemented his stocky partner with leaping kicks and splashes and scored several near-falls on a surprised Buh Buh.

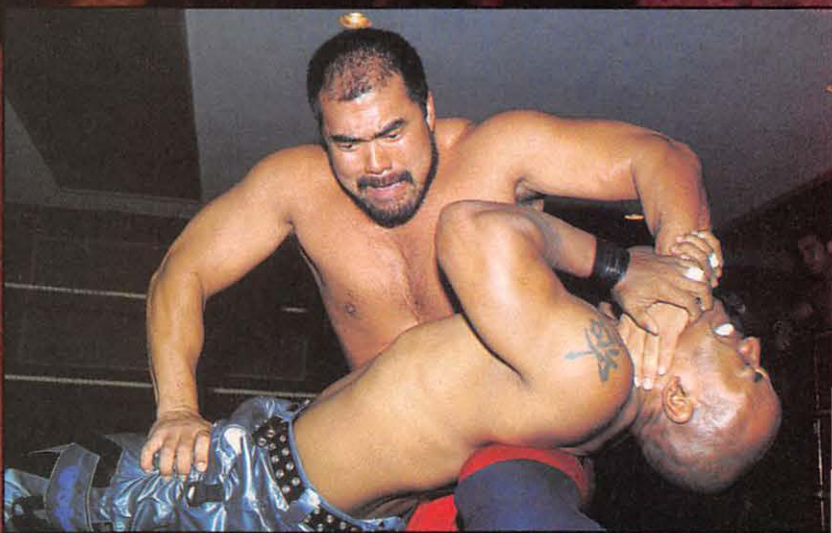
The Dudleys ended up winning, but it wasn't the cakewalk they expected. In fact, it was a rude welcome to Smackdown for Dudleyville's favorite sons.

Now that Tajiri is gone, Akio and Sakoda have transitioned into the role of spoiler, and they're making life





Maybe we're underestimating Akio in calling his team a "spoiler" on the Smackdown side. He has a lot of experience and a lot of skill. Soon he could be a Smackdown tag champ.



Sakoda is the real powerhouse of this twosome. It's a compliment in a sense to him and Akio that no one is too anxious to do battle with them.

miserable for teams with championship aspirations.

"At first glance, it might seem like Smackdown's tag team division is relatively weak, especially since the breakup of The APA and Shelton Benjamin and Charlie Haas," said WWE expert Thomas Pilliard. "Scotty Too Hotty and Rikishi aren't what you'd call dominant by any stretch. But to get a shot at that title, sooner or later you're going to have to beat Sakoda and Akio, and that's a real challenge. Let's remember that Akio had a nice career as Jimmy Yang before he got here. He was in WCW and in All-Japan. And Sakoda already has five years of experience under his belt. They didn't come out of nowhere."

According to some locker room sources, no one on the Smackdown roster wants to face the Japanese team. It's the old can't-win situation. A victory over Akio and Sakoda doesn't propel you much further up

the rankings, and a loss can be devastating to your title hopes.

Plus, they're just not particularly fun to face.

"I've been kicked in the head by the best of 'em, and I'm telling you, that Akio packs a hell of a wallop," Buh Buh said. "And Sakoda—he's pretty damn strong, especially when he's digging those fingers into your lymph nodes. Win or lose, those guys can lay a hurtin' on you."

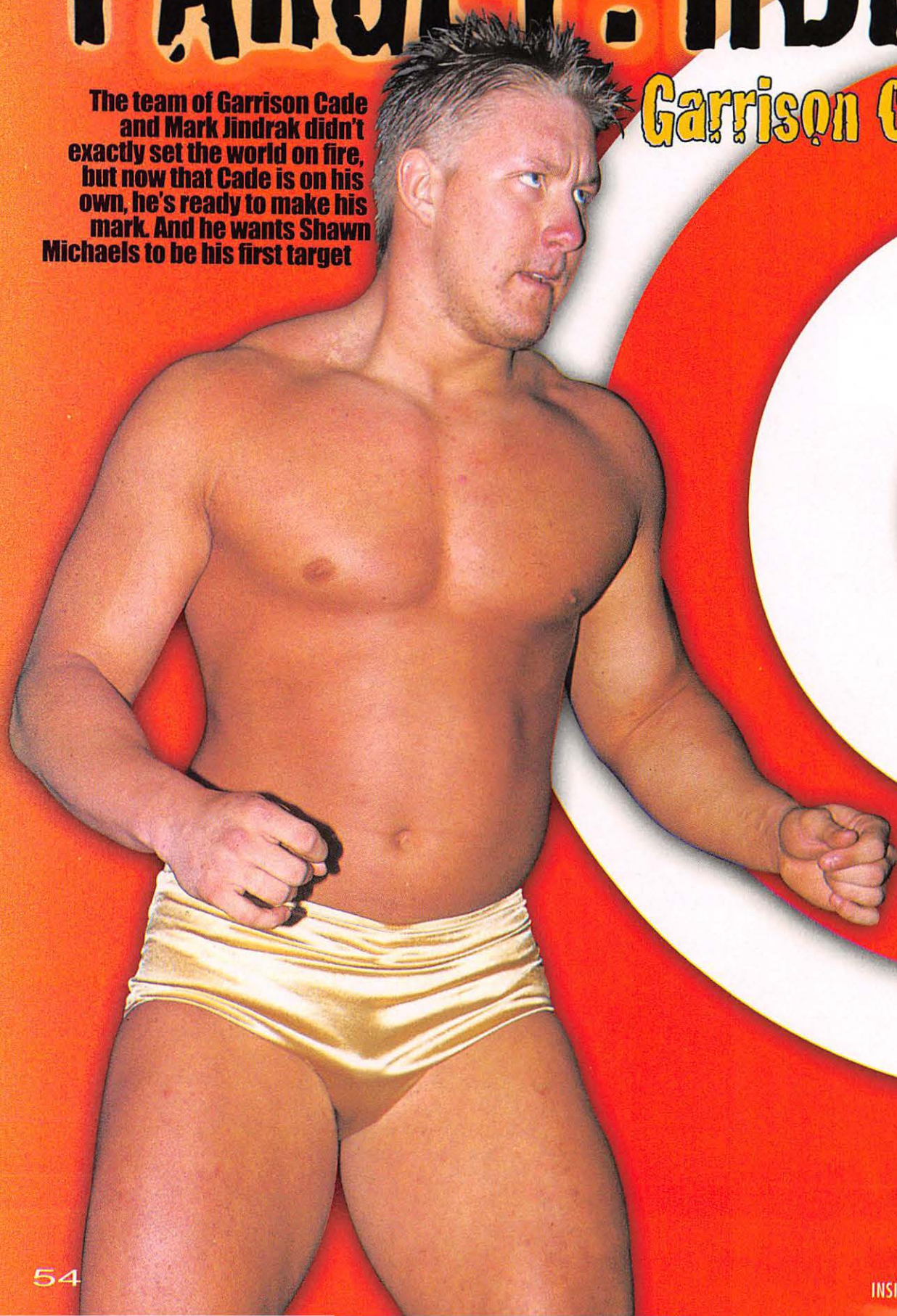
Akio and Sakoda refused to answer questions about their interest in the Smackdown tag title. Most likely they still haven't quite decided what to do since the man who recruited them is gone. But regardless of what direction that they take, you can be sure Akio and Sakoda will continue to be one of Smackdown's most underrated—and least popular—tandems. Heck, they might just be good enough to be champs. □



# TARGET: HBK!

The team of Garrison Cade and Mark Jindrak didn't exactly set the world on fire, but now that Cade is on his own, he's ready to make his mark. And he wants Shawn Michaels to be his first target

Garrison Cade





**G**ARRISON CADE REMEMBERS it like it was yesterday. The year was 1999 and he was sparring with American Dragon. Shawn Michaels was standing at ringside, watching two of his trainees go through chain wrestling exchanges. Cade was getting bored

## Is Gunning For His Former Teacher

with all the drills and grappling. He really wanted to get to the good stuff: suplexes, power bombs, and aerial moves. In fact, Cade had developed a damn good leg-drop from the top rope and was anxious to show it off, but every day it seemed like the same routine: lockups, headlocks, takedowns, armbar.

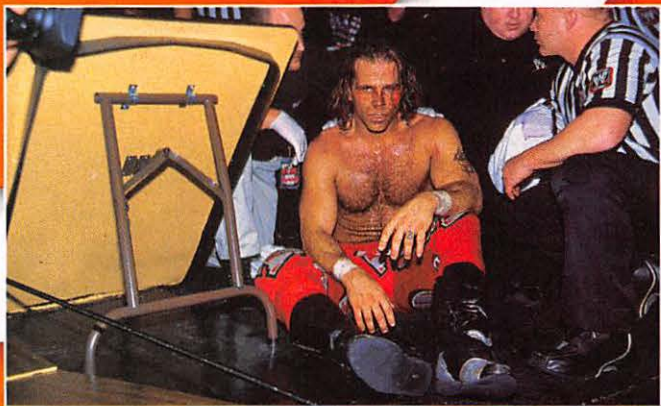
That's when Cade decided this day was going to be different.

Cade cranked on a hammerlock, and then surprised Dragon with a German suplex followed by a series of stomps. Showing surprising agility for a 6'5" man, Cade leaped to the top rope and tried to execute a moonsault. Dragon rolled out of the way the moment Cade jumped from the ropes, and Cade crashed to the mat in a heap.

Outside the ring, Michaels was shaking his head.

"Well," Michaels said, watching an embarrassed Cade slowly get up to his feet, "that was crap."

Cade certainly wasn't the first wrestling student who wanted to fly before his wings were fully formed. In fact, similar incidents occur regularly at wrestling schools around the country. Students want to try something new or don't grasp the importance of the fundamentals. In fact, some trainers will privately tell you the impetuous ones make the best wrestlers. They're the ones who refuse to accept their shortcomings. They're the ones who are absolutely determined to shine. And they're often the ones you have to keep a close eye on.



Has Garrison Cade (opposite page) been silently stewing over an alleged incident at Shawn Michaels' old school for five years now ... so much so that he's been dreaming about the day he can defeat HBK and leave him dazed and bloody (above)?

Most likely, Michaels doesn't even remember the incident. Things like that happen in wrestling gyms. But the cocky Cade has never forgotten Michaels' little jab. In fact, according to some locker room sources, Michaels' admonition has been the driving force behind his career.

"He talks about it all the time," one Raw wrestler said under condition of anonymity. "He always talks about how

Michaels gave preferential treatment to other trainees, like Spanky, Dragon, and Michael Shane, and how Michaels was always criticizing him. Of course, the moment Shawn walks into the room, Cade's buddying up to him like they're best of friends."

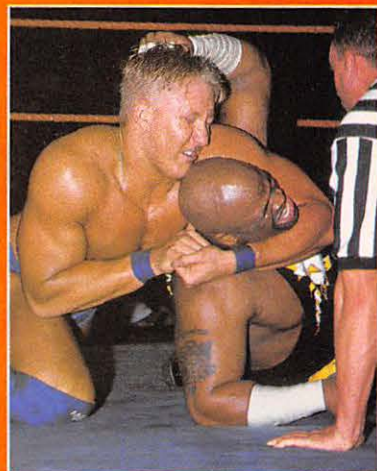
If Cade seriously holds a grudge against Michaels, it's hard to understand why. Cade was the first of Michaels' students to sign a WWE developmental deal, and that was because HBK personally vouched for him. Cade—then known as Lance Cade—was one of the top draws in Michaels' Texas Wrestling Alliance and held that company's TV title. If Michaels really was out to get him, would Cade have received as many opportunities as he did?

But according to our sources, Cade still seethes at the perceived snub and Michaels' treatment of him. Cade refused to answer questions about his relationship with Michaels, but other wrestlers say he makes no secret of his desire to get his hands on Michaels in the ring.

"It's his ultimate dream match," our insider continued. "He compares it to the Bruno Sammartino-Larry Zbyszko feud, but this time he says it'll be the student leaving the teacher a bloody mess."

Cade might get his opportunity now that Mark Jindrak, his former tag team partner, has been sent to Smackdown as part of the draft lottery. Cade is on his own on Raw, and he sees Michaels several days per week. If a war is going to erupt, this is the time for it to happen.

A win over Michaels would make Cade a contender for any title he chooses to pursue. But does Cade have the maturity—or the skills—to defeat a legend, especially a legend who taught him much of what he knows? We have a feeling we'll find out soon. □



Cade is plenty cocky, but he's been laying pretty low since his tag team partner, Mark Jindrak, was drafted by Smackdown. That could all change anytime now.



# IN THEORY, THE contestants on *Tough Enough* have it easy.

Survive a few months on a goofy reality show and get yourself a WWE contract. Sure beats busting your tail on the indy circuit for \$20 paydays for years on end until WWE finally (if you're very lucky) takes a look at you.

But in real reality, the *Tough Enough* winners have had a rocky road to traverse. Maven, one of the first two winners, has struggled with a series of injuries and dead-end feuds. Nidia has spent most of her career as a valet and is only now getting a taste of wrestling success. Jackie Gayda made a disastrous debut on *Raw* in 2002 and is now looked at as valet and catfighting material only. Linda Miles had a decent run as Shaniqua, manager of The Basham Brothers, but she's back in OVW, perhaps never to be recalled.

TE runners-up Chris Nowinski and Matt Morgan had some shining moments in WWE, but Morgan, too, is back in OVW, and Nowinski has been suffering from post-concussion syndrome for months and might never wrestle again. John Hennigan (Nitro) is showing promise as Eric Bischoff's intern, but it's only a comedy role so far.

TE III co-winner Matt Cappote III is determined to shatter the *Tough Enough* curse.

"I've said it a million times, but I really don't expect WWE to hand me anything on a silver platter," offered the Rochester, New York, native. "All I'm looking for is the opportunity to showcase my abilities and entertain the fans. If I can do that, I'll know I succeeded, regardless of what happens next. Just give me a chance."

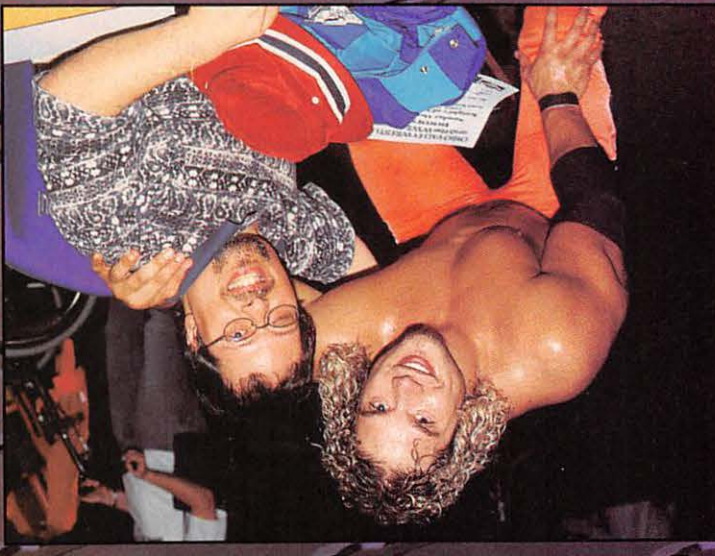
Cappote III got a bit of a career break when he was bullied by TE trainer Hardcore Holly on the reality show. Fans sympathized with the good-looking rookie, while Holly came across as a first-class jerk.

Cappote III gained revenge on Holly in

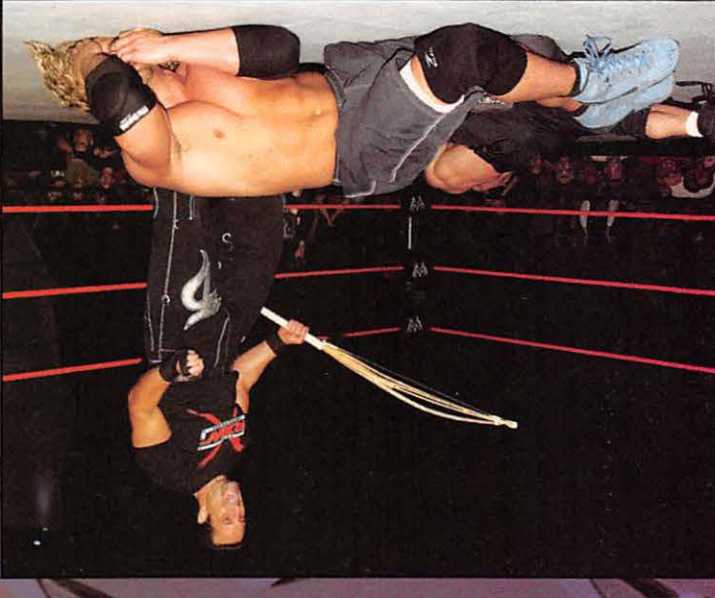
More than two years after the first *Tough Enough* ended, not a single one of the champions or contenders has made much of an impact in WWE. Matt Cappote III is ready to buck that trend. But he needs an opportunity if he's to do so

Can Matt Cappote III Break The *Tough Enough* Jinx?

Remember the rude welcome that Tommy Dreamer gave to Cappote III (and John Hennigan) on their first night on *Raw* early last year? Cappote III hopes to fare far better when he's next on WWE TV, whenever that is.



Cappote III has enjoyed a great rapport with OVW fans during his stay there. He has the charisma. He has the raw skill. He has the desire. The call-up to the big time has to come at some point.



Remember the rude welcome that Tommy Dreamer gave to Cappote III (and John Hennigan) on their first night on *Raw* early last year? Cappote III hopes to fare far better when he's next on WWE TV, whenever that is.



OVW, where he bested the WWE veteran in a student vs. teacher series. Shortly after that feud concluded, Holly returned to WWE and was recognized as a top contender to the Smackdown title. Even though he had wrestled just a handful of matches in WWE, Cappotelli had already shown he could hang with a WWE headliner.

Right away, *Tough Enough* trainer Al Snow knew that Cappotelli had potential.

"Most rookies would have walked out after taking the type of beating Holly put on him," Snow said. "Matt took everything he could dish out. You could see in his eyes that he wanted nothing more than to prove him wrong and show that he could survive in WWE. Matt's head is screwed on right, and I think he has a bright future in WWE."

Unlike Maven and the rest of his *Tough Enough* predecessors, Cappotelli has been able to ease himself into WWE competition. He has steadily improved in OVW, developing his skills far away from the glare of the WWE spotlight, though he does get the occasional house show booking. Any missteps he has made along the way haven't been broadcast to a national audience, unlike

Miss Jackie's infamous debut match.

Cappotelli is arguably better prepared for life in WWE than any other *Tough Enough* alumnus. And because his contemporaries haven't exactly set the world on fire, fans will have more realistic expectations.

"I know I got a huge break, and I'm going to do whatever I have to do to make the best of it," Cappotelli said. "Really, just give me a chance!" □

A CHANCE!



Victoria. Jackie. Nikita. Shaniqua. They've all guided the Bashams at some point. Now Doug and Danny are on their own and in a serious slump. The need a strong woman with a strong hand

# DESPERATE FOR DOMINANCE

## Bashams Are A Bust Without A Woman's Touch

By Dan Murphy

**W**ORD OF SHANIQUA'S demotion to OVW came as harsh news to Smackdown's kinkiest tag team.

To Doug and Danny Basham, the riding crop-carrying, leather-clad beauty was more than just a valet.

She was the glue that bound their tenuous team together, the reliable distraction that helped them capture the Smackdown tag title mere weeks after making their TV debut.

After that win, Smackdown cameras stumbled across Shaniqua giving the boys a bit of sweet discipline, *Pulp Fiction* style. But Shaniqua wasn't providing Doug and Danny with cheap thrills. In fact, she



It could be that Shaniqua really was the key to the Bashams' success in WWE. They haven't been the same since she was sent back to OVW.





At one point in 2002, the Bashams had both Miss Jackie and Victoria as allies in their Revolution clique in OVW. Now they're without a diva to drive them.

was the team's motivator. Without her at their side, the Bashams—and Doug in particular—have been reeling.

WWE fans may be surprised to know this, but Doug has been wrestling since 1993. The nephew of OVW owner Danny Davis, he competed for several years as a clean-cut fan favorite. After a brief sabbatical, he returned to the ring under a leather bondage mask as the mysterious Machine. As The Machine, Doug embarked on a reign of terror in OVW. But once he paired up with Victoria, he became a truly unstoppable force, dominating a promotion that also boasted talent like Brock Lesnar, John Cena, Randy Orton, and Rob Conway.

Doug ended up losing the mask in a match with Nick Dinsmore, but Victoria's presence at ringside gave him the confidence that turned him into a superstar.

You can find guys like Doug Basham on any softball field across the country. He's the kind of guy who's usually easy-going and relaxed, but if his girlfriend is in the stands, he'll be the most aggressive player on the field—swinging for the fences, running through the catcher, and dashing from shallow right field to try to make a play in deep center. He's a showoff, and having a beautiful girl in his corner brings out the worst in him.

That is, except in the world of wrestling. When Doug has a lovely lady at ringside, he becomes a much better wrestler. Without that inspiration, he can be listless.

When Victoria got the call-up to WWE, Doug was quick to replace her with

Jackie Gayda, followed by Nikita. He simply needed to have a valet watching him, admiring him. He also wanted the ladies to punish him when he didn't give his all.

Danny Basham (The Damaja in OVW) went along with his partner's odd preoccupation, simply because he saw how effective Doug was when he was performing for a special lady. The two had feuded intensely in OVW, but they put their personal differences aside when there was a pretty face to keep them in line.

It certainly worked in WWE, when the Bashams and Shaniqua snatched the tag belts in no time. But now that Shaniqua is out of the picture (and not expected back anytime soon), Doug is unmotivated and Danny is growing frustrated.

"You should have seen Danny after Shelton Benjamin upset Triple-H after being traded to Raw," one Smackdown wrestler confided. "Danny is starting to think he's capable of being a breakout singles wrestler, like Benjamin. He's wondering if Doug is holding him back, especially since Doug seems to be so unfocused."

The Bashams are desperately searching for a diva to take control and get them back on track. They require an attractive, confident woman who's not afraid to get a little physical. (Dawn Marie, are you listening?) If they can't find their leather-clad guiding light, one of Smackdown's most promising teams seems destined for a premature meltdown. □



Doug and Danny got the best of The APA in a brief 2003 feud, but they have really struggled since dropping the Smackdown tag belts. Is Dawn Marie available?



He thought hooking up with a hot valet would be a shortcut to the top. Instead, Sonny Siaki's relationship with Trinity has set his career back. And he finally realizes it

Photos by Vern Verna

# SONNY SIAKI'S LAMENT:

**"TEAMING WITH TRINITY WAS THE  
STUPIDEST THING I'VE EVER DONE"**



**W**HEN SONNY SIAKI walks into a room, everybody knows about it.

The man who refers to himself as "Mr. Number One" craves the spotlight the way a fat man craves a jelly doughnut.

He's not one to tolerate being in anybody's shadow.

Sadly, that's exactly where he seems to be, and it's all his fault.

Siaki forged an alliance with the beautiful Trinity when both were part of Vince Russo's nefarious Sports Entertainment Xtreme (SEX) faction in NWA-TNA. It seemed to be a perfect match. Both Siaki and Trinity were body beautifuls who oozed charisma and were prepared to go to any lengths to achieve championship glory.

Unfortunately for Siaki, he's not much of a student of wrestling history. Perhaps if he were, he would have realized that having a knockout chick by your side isn't always a good idea. For every Randy Savage (who became a household name with the lovely Elizabeth), you have a dozen Marc Meros, John Tatum, and Steven Richards. These are men who watched helplessly as their valets became bigger stars than they were. In many cases, their careers never recovered.

It didn't take long for signs of dissension to appear. Trinity proved to be magnetic with TNA cameramen and

often became the focal point of Siaki's matches. Fans waved signs for Trinity or busied themselves trying to attract her attention at ringside. Siaki's matches were afterthoughts.

Of course, Trinity didn't do much to shine that spotlight back on her man. Instead, she made ringside her personal catwalk, preening around the ring in the most revealing outfits she could get away with. It got so bad that she would pose for the fans after Siaki's wins, and then walk to the locker room without him.

Trinity and Siaki finally split once she signed a loyalty oath to NWA heavyweight champion Jeff Jarrett. Siaki refused and then reunited with the returning (and no longer evil) Vince Russo.



Everything was so good for Sonny Siaki just a few months ago. He was doing fairly well in TNA, but more importantly, he had the hot girl, Trinity, at his side. It didn't last. And now his career has regressed.



No one is questioning whether Siaki is a great athlete. He certainly is. But he's had some bad breaks of late. At least he's big enough to admit he made some bad career moves. Well, one bad one at least.

Now Siaki and Trinity are enemies, but the damage might already be done.

Because of his good looks (and a striking resemblance to The Rock, about which he is sick of hearing), as well as his ring skills, many observers pegged Siaki as one of TNA's top young guns. After a silly run with The Flying Elvises, Siaki appeared to be ready to make good on his potential by winning the X title. But Siaki's reign was a disappointment. Then he settled into a role as a Russo henchman. At a time when he should have been making a move for the NWA title, he was inadvertently making Trinity a star at his own expense. Now wrestlers like D-Lo Brown, A.J. Styles, Chris Harris, Raven, Abyss, and Ron Killings have all jumped ahead of him in the line for a title shot.

A fan favorite by default, Siaki is further from title contention than ever before.

"I wasn't using my head," Siaki said of his relationship with Trinity. "All I saw was a sexy lady. Who wouldn't want a hot girl with him? Now I realize that teaming with Trinity was the stupidest thing I've ever done. She knows all my strengths and weaknesses. I could be dealing with her for months, whether I want to or not."

Beauty really is only skin deep, but hatred runs to the very core of a man. It's a lesson Siaki learned the hard way. He's still learning. □





# Sonjay

By Dan Murphy

**J**ERRY LYNN HAS worked just about everywhere. WCW, ECW, WWE, NWA-TNA. You throw together any three letters and there's a pretty good chance Lynn has worked in a promotion by that name at some point during the past 16 years.

Lynn has wrestled a lot of the biggest names in the business and has swapped major titles with the likes of Rob Van Dam, Jeff Hardy, and Justin Credible. He's a man who knows talent when he sees it.

And Lynn sees a truckload of talent in Sonjay Dutt.

"Sonjay's a natural—that's the only way I can explain it," Lynn said. Along with Chris Sabin and Elix Skipper, Lynn and Dutt comprise Team NWA, the foursome that has competed for the Americas X Cup against international squads from Mexico, Canada, Great Britain, and Japan. "Jay has great intuition, fantastic high-flying moves, and a hell of a killer instinct. He knows exactly when to move in for the kill, which is rare for guys with his experience level. I'd say he's going to be a superstar of the future, but as far as I'm concerned, he's real close to being a superstar now."

Dutt hails from Bollywood, India's answer to Hollywood and the world's most prolific film-producing city. He was trained by Larry Sharpe and made his pro debut in NWA Wildside in 2000. Dubbed "The Original Playa From The Himalaya," Dutt thrilled fans and peers with his Sonjay star press and his Bombay splash.

In 2002, Dutt was named Combat Zone Wrestling's Breakout Star of the Year. His three-way match with Chris Cage and Ruckus was consid-



# Dutt:

## PUTTING THE TNT IN TEAM NWA

It's a long way from Bollywood to Nashville, but star power knows no bounds. Bollywood's top grappler might be Team NWA's unsung MVP

ered by many to be an instant classic. But Dutt's shining moment came on September 19, 2003, when he defeated Tony Mamaluke, Christopher Daniels, and Eddie Colon in succession to win the Major League Wrestling junior heavyweight tournament in Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Even with those impressive credentials, Dutt was (and still is) far from a household name. Though he had captured titles in regional promotions such as CZW, the IWA, the CSWF, and others, national recognition eluded him. Fortunately, NWA matchmakers had heard enough about him to invite him to TNA.

Dutt quickly established himself as a contender for the X division title, but came up just short of winning the belt. His ring presence and offensive tools made Lynn one of his biggest fans. When the TNA talent department asked him who he thought should represent the NWA in the Americas X Cup tourney, Lynn immediately went to Dutt.

Dutt is determined not to let the former ECW

World champion down.

"It truly was an honor to be selected to represent the NWA, and I was very proud to have men like Jerry and Elix vouch for me," Dutt said. "I think what we're doing—in facing international competition in singles and tag matches—is revolutionary and could change the face of wrestling. I'm honored to be a part of the Americas X Cup scene, and I'll do anything I can to help Team NWA succeed."

So far, Team NWA has come tantalizingly close to the Americas X Cup, but has yet to win the trophy. For many observers, Dutt has been the biggest surprise on that team. He hasn't been the weak link some expected him to be. Instead, he has held his own against talented internationally tested wrestlers. He has been arguably the most versatile competitor on Team NWA, able to transition his style to counter that of his opponents. Dutt has been the squad's spark plug.

"Just keep an eye on him," said Lynn. "This is one very special talent." □



Sonjay Dutt wears down Nate "Spyder" Webb during the 2003 Ted Petty Invitational Tournament. The India native has really gotten around in his four years as a pro. He could yet prove to be an unlikely hero for Team NWA in the Americas X Cup.



## Where does WrestleMania XX rate compared to other WrestleManias?

**H**ULK HOGAN STARING nose-to-nose with Andre the Giant. Roddy Piper bodyslamming Mr. T during a boxing match. Randy Savage hoisting Elizabeth on his shoulder after capturing the WWF World title. WrestleMania has provided some amazing moments over the past 20 years. Is it the sight of 50,000-plus people? Or all the storylines that culminate at WWE's premier event? Or the breathtaking matches that WWE superstars, anxious to earn their places in wrestling

history, deliver year after year?

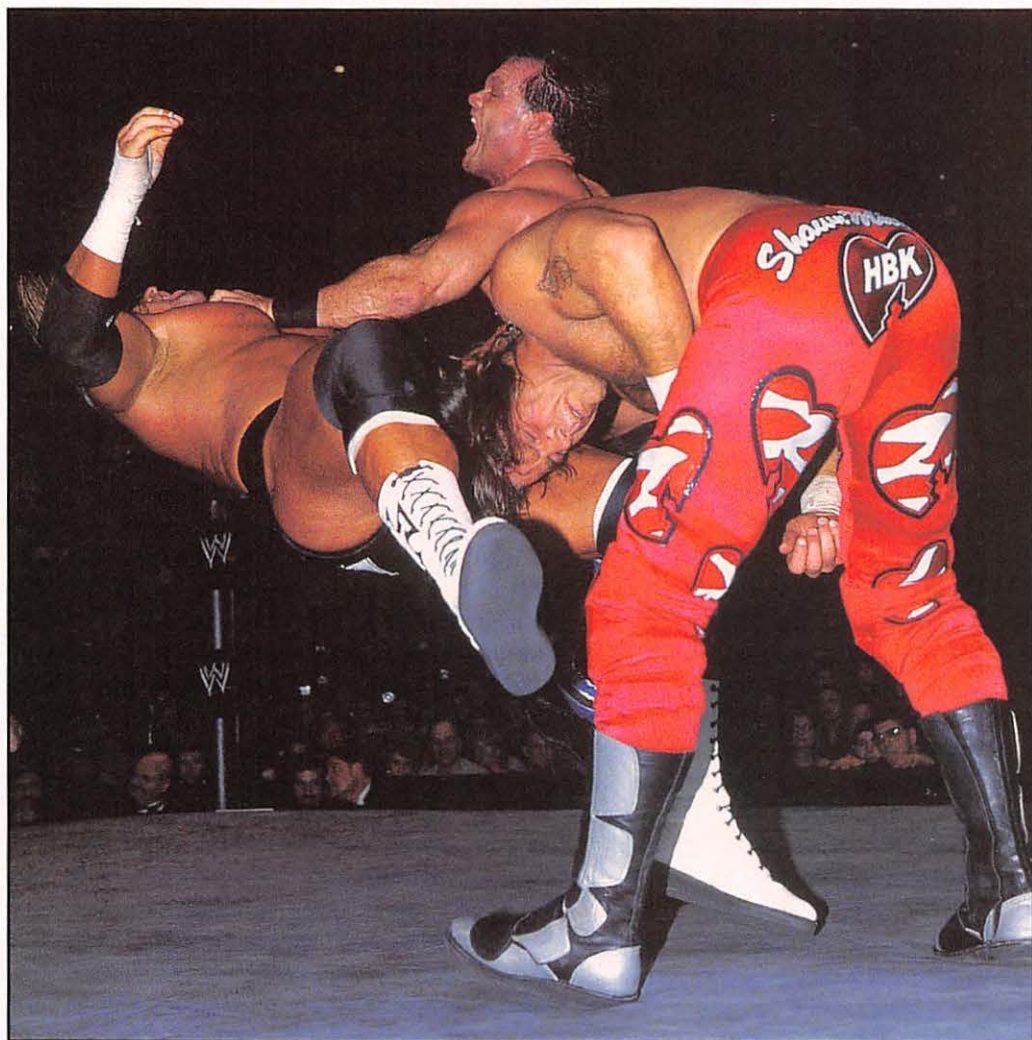
Before the fans file out of the building and before pay-per-view buyers switch off their television sets, the comparisons begin. How did this year's WrestleMania measure against the rest? This was an especially poignant question this year considering that WWE hyped WrestleMania XX for nearly the entire year leading up to the extravaganza. New York's Madison Square Garden was indeed the place "where it all began again."

So how did it measure up? Was The Undertaker's match with Kane as good as their first encounter at WrestleMania XIV? Did the so-called dream match between Bill Goldberg and Brock Lesnar live up to expectations? How does Molly Holly being shaved bald rank among WrestleMania's most outrageous spectacles? And how did Smackdown champion Eddie Guerrero's title defense against Kurt Angle, and Chris Benoit's Raw championship victory over Shawn Michaels and defending champ Triple-H, rank among the all-time best world title clashes?

Clearly, there was plenty to analyze and much debate after WrestleMania XX. Did it live up to the hype? And, more importantly, how did it rank among the gold standard of prior WrestleManias. Publisher Stu Saks goes around the table with Managing Editor Brandi Maniewicz and Senior Writers Harry Burkett and Dan Murphy in this passionate four-way conversation.

**"I think the real story about WrestleMania XX is how Bill Goldberg vs. Brock Lesnar bombed, and just how it bombed with the spectacle it created."**

**—Dan Murphy**



The three-way featuring Triple-H, Chris Benoit, and Shawn Michaels will undoubtedly find its way onto most people's list of the top five WrestleMania matches of all-time—if not number one.





Hulk Hogan's connection to the fans fueled the rise of the WWF and WrestleMania in the 1980s. Harry Burkett is quite certain the fans would have liked to have seen him make an appearance at WM XX.

**STU SAKS:** As we start this discussion, I think we can agree that WWE and all of its wrestlers put forth some tremendous efforts and there were certainly some great matches. The question before us whether it measured up to prior WrestleManias. I'd like to go around the table and take your temperature, so to speak, regarding your impressions

of WrestleMania XX. Brandi, you're probably the most opinionated of all of us here. Why don't you start?

**BRANDI MANKIEWICZ:** I watched WrestleMania trying to figure out what the theme was this year. Obviously, Vince McMahon wasn't kidding when he said WrestleMania XX would be "where it all begins again," meaning that he didn't settle for nostalgia acts. Believe it or not, wrestling was presented as a sport again. Whether it was Guerrero beating Angle, or Benoit winning the three-way, casual viewers—and I'm talking about the ones who might buy the WrestleMania pay-per-view, and might not even really keep up the rest of the year—have to think, boy, this has really come a long way since that Hulk Hogan and Mr. T crap, or even Sgt. Slaughter dressing up like an Iraqi and huffing and puffing through a so-called main event against Hogan.

**DAN MURPHY:** I have to agree with that. Vince did the cartoon stuff in the '80s, and he pushed shock as far as it could go in the '90s, and now he's settling in on something that is surprisingly straightforward: guys just wrestling each other, at least in the main events.

**SAKS:** But of course, it was more than that. There was plenty of entertainment, especially humor, thrown in as well. John Cena doing his rap, Molly Holly getting her head shaved, Kane vs. Undertaker with all the supernatural themes, and the soap opera stuff among Chris Jericho, Trish Stratus, and Christian all would remind anybody that Vince McMahon's vision of pro wrestling is still sports entertainment, although he now prefers to tell the most compelling stories in the ring.

**MURPHY:** Absolutely. And I think the real story about WrestleMania XX is how Bill Goldberg vs. Brock Lesnar bombed, and just how it bombed with the spectacle it created. Now, I realize there were some special circumstances, like Goldberg and Lesnar wrestling their final WWE matches for the foreseeable future. But I think the concept of dream matches—mainly two big bulls who haven't wrestled each other before—is going by the wayside. I think fans want tried-and-true matchups they know are going to deliver. Sure, they've seen Guerrero vs. Angle before, and Chris Benoit might have been a fresh dynamic in the very long Shawn-Hunter feud, but

fans realize that all these wrestlers are going to force themselves and each other to kick it up a notch come 'Mania time.

**SAKS:** So, Harry, you've been quiet so far—and I know you're just chomping to delve into this topic. Are we going to talk about WrestleMania XX in hallowed tones a few decades from now? Where would you put it in the all-time WrestleMania lineup?

**HARRY BURKETT:** Wow, Stu, you had to give the toughest question right from the outset. Actually, I would rank it lower than maybe some other people would. But considering the very high standard for WrestleManias, I'm not suggesting it was a failure. Considering all the money it made, it couldn't be considered that. In my mind, WrestleManias I and II are rather low in terms of quality. I mean, you had matches like Tito Santana vs. The Executioner, and Jake Roberts vs. George Wells, at those shows. WrestleMania IX is also low on my list. The 600-pound Yokozuna wrestling in the main event, let alone two matches on the same show, is not my idea of excitement. There were some terrific matches, but there was no real magic, no aura, to this WrestleMania. There



was no Hogan bodyslamming Andre with the camera bulbs flashing, and no Hogan "hulking up" against The Rock as the fans go wild.

**SAKS:** I see the trend here. I suppose you don't like the fact that Hogan wasn't there.

**BURKETT:** That wasn't my point, but subconsciously, I think you're right. It sounded nice when McMahon said WrestleMania XX would be the place "where it all begins again," but is that what we really want WrestleMania to be? WrestleMania, especially the 20th version, should have been a celebration of what that event has meant to the business. And with no Hogan there, and no Randy Savage, and no Roddy Piper, it seemed like there wasn't much regard for the past. I'm not saying WrestleMania XX should have dwelled in the past, but the interaction of former and current stars would have been very memorable. Frankly, I think WrestleMania should have had a Slamboree feel to it.



While WrestleMania III offered its share of celebrities, including Alice Cooper (posed with Jake Roberts, left), the card as a whole is generally considered the best ever. And the best match on that best card pitted Rick Steamboat against Randy Savage (above).



**MURPHY:** See, I disagree. I think that's what the Hall of Fame was for. All the old-timers had a great time at the Hall of Fame the night before, but the next day, it was time to focus on the future.

**MANKIEWICZ:** I realize WrestleMania was close to five hours already, but it would have been nice if WWE

could have filmed the Hall of Fame ceremonies in their entirety and make that available to pay-per-view subscribers before the big show.

**SAKS:** That's an interesting idea. From listening to what you have to say, I think we would agree that WrestleMania had excellent match quality, but there wasn't a ton of razzle-daz-

zle. This is surprising coming from you, Harry, because wouldn't you be the first to complain if Vanna White, Alex Trebek, or Morton Downey Jr. were there again this year?

**MANKIEWICZ:** We would be in shock and horror if Morton Downey Jr. was at WrestleMania XX. He's dead, Stu.

**SAKS:** But of course his spirit lives as one of the worst WrestleMania celebrities ever.

**MURPHY:** I think WrestleMania XX was similar to WrestleMania XIII in a way. I don't mean match quality, but if you remember, they went with the very risky Sid Vicious-Undertaker main event that year and didn't spend a dime on celebrities this year. I believe Vince McMahon has come to the realization that, as far as showmanship goes, his superstars are second to none. Besides, when you have





Brock Lesnar vs. Bill Goldberg (left), certainly a marquee match-up on paper, failed to live up to the hype. Dan Murphy feels WWE fans are a bit more discriminating in 2004 than they used to be and would prefer a matchup between wrestlers who have proven they can match up well against one another, like Kurt Angle and Eddie Guerrero (below).



Lilian Garcia, why do you need Aretha Franklin?

**SAKS:** Getting back to match quality, I think we would agree that the three-way match—Chris Benoit vs. Shawn Michaels vs. Triple-H for the Raw title—was the best match on the show, just edging out Guerrero vs. Angle. Are we in agreement on that?

**MURPHY:** Yes, I think we are.

**SAKS:** If I read Harry right, he thinks WrestleMania XX is somewhere in the middle. What about you, Brandi?

**MANKIEWICZ:** The interesting thing about this WrestleMania is that Vince didn't promote it like a one-in-a-lifetime deal. It was more like, "if you like the kind of action we gave you here at WrestleMania, then you can look forward to other matches like these at our future pay-per-views." In that sense, I don't think he wanted it to appear that extraordinary. If this were SummerSlam, it would be in the top five. Being that it's WrestleMania,

**"It's like the difference between an A-plus and an A-minus. The focus on match quality—especially the world title matches—made this a special WrestleMania."**

**—Dan Murphy**

I'd say around number 10. WrestleMania III, along with most of the WrestleManias of the late-1990s, when there was such electricity in WWE, are among the very best. It would have been hard for this to one—or any WrestleMania—to live up to a year's worth of mega-hype. That doesn't mean Benoit, Guerrero, and the rest of those guys didn't bust their butts, though.

**SAKS:** How does the Benoit-Michaels-Triple-H three-way measure up to Rick Steamboat vs. Randy Savage at WrestleMania? At one time, that was pretty much considered number one in terms of quality.

**MANKIEWICZ:** There's no question that, in terms of intensity and hard-hitting action, the WrestleMania XX three-way was best. Only the Shawn Michaels-Razor Ramon ladder match might top it. But in terms of capturing the crowd's attention with a wrestling match, nothing has topped the pace and simplicity of Steamboat-Savage.

**SAKS:** Where do you rank WrestleMania XX, Dan?

**MURPHY:** I kind of agree with Brandi. I would rank it a bit higher, though, maybe somewhere around seven or eight out of 20 when you consider all factors. Some of the '90s WrestleManias would be above it, and a few of the '80s WrestleManias would be above it. For my money, WrestleMania III is number one, and you can make a pretty strong case for WrestleMania XIV, when Steve Austin won the title. But, just like Harry was saying, even ranking number 10 or 15 out of 20 great events like WrestleMania is still damn good. It's like the difference between an A-plus and an A-minus. The focus on match quality—especially the world title matches—made this a special WrestleMania. For all of us old school fans who've always wanted to see WrestleMania promoted on the basis of championships and excellent wrestling, I don't think anyone should be griping about this WrestleMania. □



## INSPECTOR IMPACT

HEIGHT: 6'5"

WEIGHT: 285

HOMETOWN: Hell's Kitchen, NY

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE:

Being asked for the first time to tour with Japan's Zero-One a few years ago. That gave him a lot of

confidence and really made him think he could make it big as a

wrestler. Now he has a WWE deal

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Intimidates.

It only takes one look from this menacing monster to make most people shiver with fright

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE:

Motivation. This giant sometimes

needs to be pushed to use his skills.

Until WWE suit John Larinaitis

tapped him to be his mole in Ohio

Valley Wrestling, the former Horshu didn't find much to motivate him.

Now that he has a reason to

antagonize so many others in

OVW, he's much happier

PET FINISHER: Shu-icide (holding reverse DDT)

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE:

Balancing his budding acting and

wrestling careers. Juggling

interests in Hollywood and

Louisville isn't easy, but he's

making progress. Look for Impact

in *The Girl Next Door* as Mule. Look

for Impact at every OVW show

sneaking around trying to get

information to give to Larinaitis.

Look for Impact to have to choose

between his careers soon

OUTLOOK FOR 2004: The main

WWE roster is lacking musclebound

men who can make an impact. Who

better to fill the void than Inspector

Impact? When he gets the call,

Impact is certain to make his

presence known quickly

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS:

"If Horshu or whatever his name

is now thinks he's gonna get

somewhere in WWE by being a yes

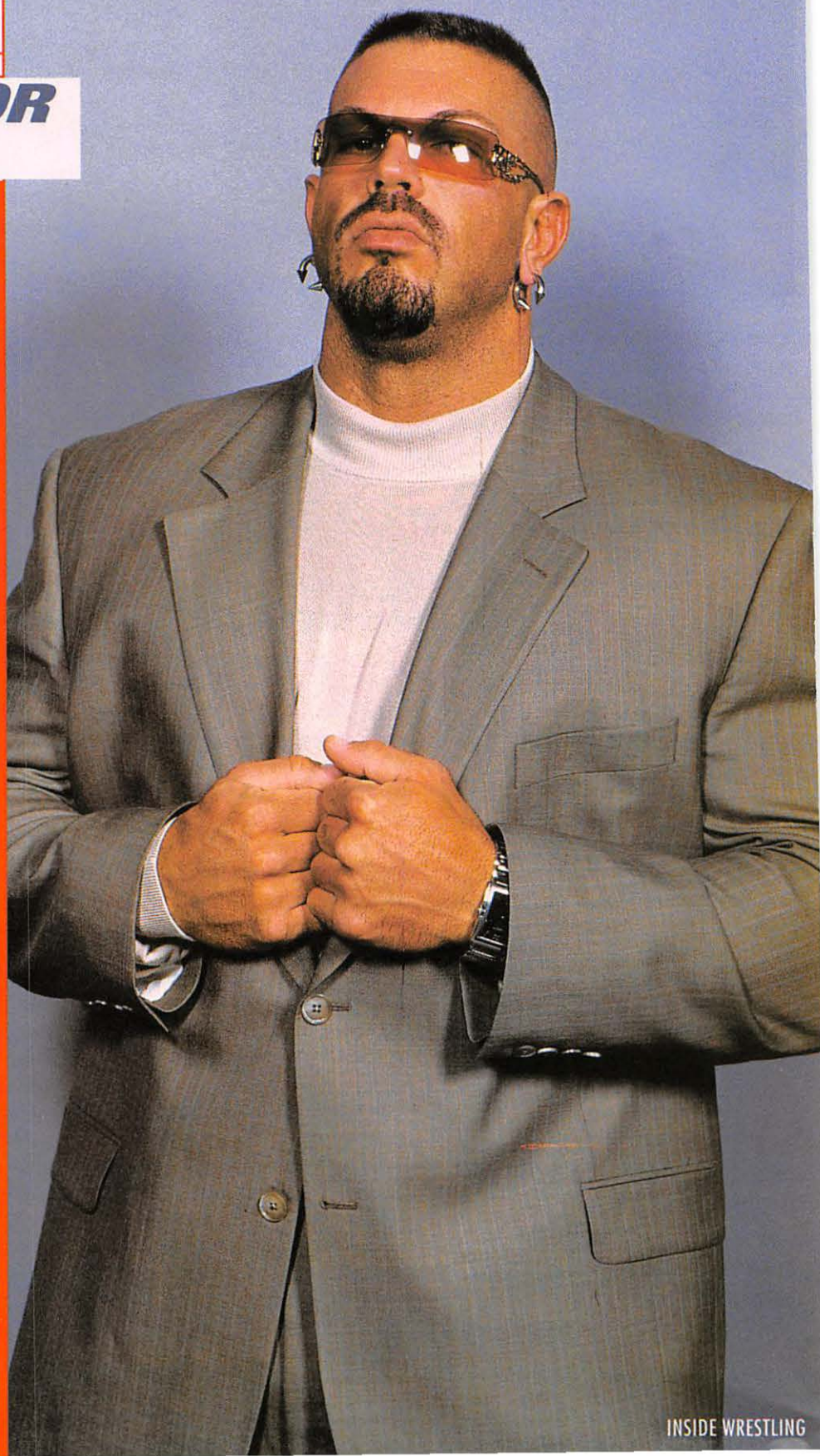
man for the office, he's got another

think coming. He'd be better off

beating his way through the OVW

roster!"

—OVW manager Kenny Bolin





## SHAWN MICHAELS

HEIGHT: 6'1"

WEIGHT: 217

HOMETOWN: San Antonio, TX

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE:

The first WWF World title win—at WrestleMania XII—was something he had dreamed about for so long, so that barely edges out his Raw title win at Survivor Series 2002, which happened four years after he thought his career ended due to serious back injuries

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Yikes—what doesn't he do well? Tremendous stamina, incredible resilience and courage, fine technical wrestler, even an underrated brawler. Let's call him versatile

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE:

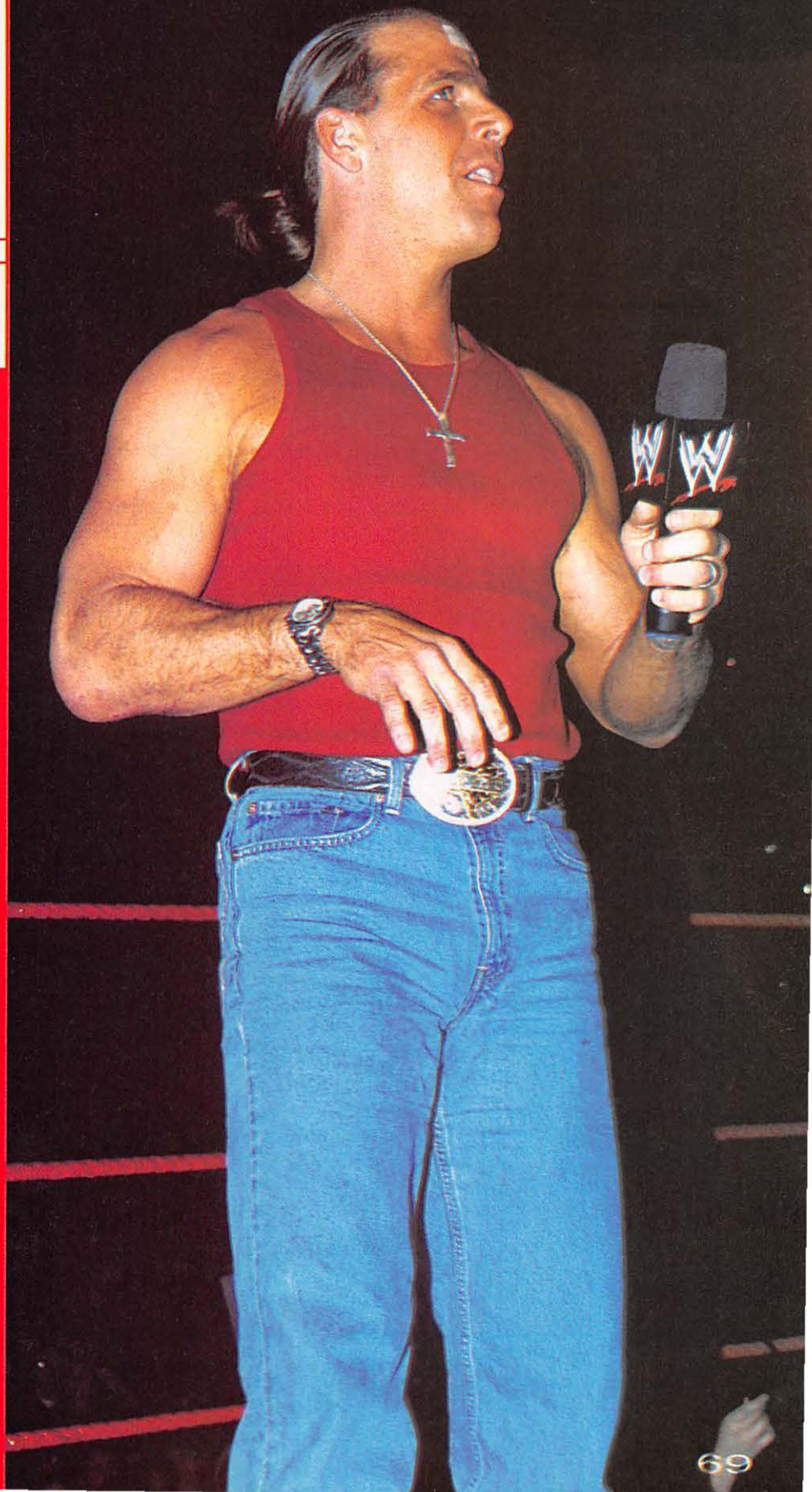
HBK gets distracted a bit too easily for a man of his intelligence and experience

PET FINISHER: Superkick

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: There have been so many. But we have to think the toughest was coming out of retirement after four-plus years ... and at such a high level. It's astounding that his back has held up so well to a full-time schedule

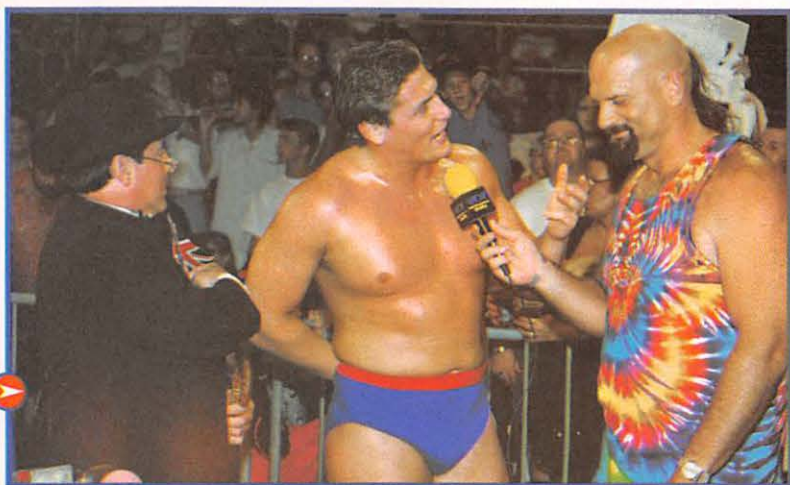
OUTLOOK FOR 2004: Since informing WWE that he was ready to resume that full schedule last year, he has been right there in the Raw title mix. We don't expect that to change anytime soon. He makes everyone around him better. But we see a heel turn coming sooner rather than later

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "Even I can admit that Shawn is one of the true greats of this era. He doesn't just make the people he wrestles better. He forces you to be better or he'll make you look real bad, and I'm not the kind of guy who ever wants to look bad." —Triple-H





# wrestling timeline



## **SPRING 1993:**

After competing for nearly a decade on the rough-and-tumble British circuit (including stiff toughman contests), Regal makes his WCW debut as Lord Steven Regal, taking on Sir William (Bill Dundee) as his equally stuffy manager.

## **SEPTEMBER 19, 1993:**

In what is considered a major upset at the time, Regal defeats Ricky "The Dragon" Steamboat to win the WCW TV title at Fall Brawl.

## **MAY 10, 1965:**

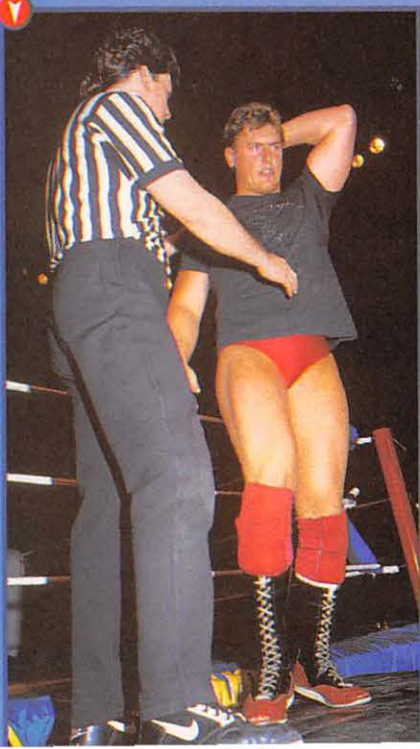
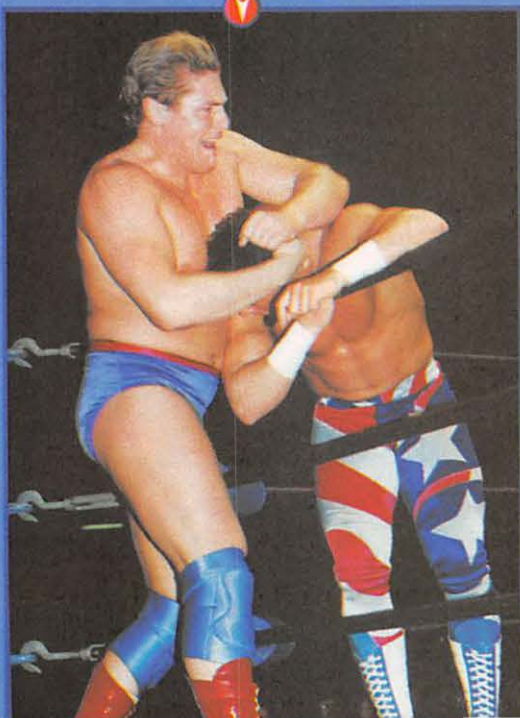
Darren Matthews is born in the blue-collar town of Blackpool, England. With limited job prospects, Matthews trains under Marty Jones and makes his pro wrestling debut at age 15.

## **JUNE 17, 1993:**

Regal defeats Marcus Alexander Bagwell at Clash of the Champions XXIII in Norfolk, Virginia.

## **NOVEMBER 20, 1993:**

Despite being heated enemies, Regal and Steamboat are forced, thanks to the (bad) luck of a draw, to team up in the Battlebowl tournament. Personality conflicts plague the technical masters as they lose to another unusual team, that of Shockmaster and Paul Orndorff.





# William Regal

*INSIDE WRESTLING journeys back in time to examine the career of a superstar who has left a major imprint on the sport*

## **JANUARY 27, 1994:**

Wrestles Dustin Rhodes to a 15-minute draw at Clash of the Champions XXVI. The 15-minute time limit would become Regal's best friend, as he would regularly wrestle to draws with WCW's top wrestlers in TV title matches.

## **MAY 2, 1994:**

WCW color commentator Larry Zbyszko comes out of retirement to challenge the arrogant Regal for the TV title at a TV taping in Atlanta. The former AWA World champion shows he still has a flair for the gold by beating Regal to end his seven-month-plus reign.

## **OCTOBER 1994:**

As part of a talent exchange with New Japan Pro Wrestling, Regal teams with Mike Enos in NJPW's Super Grade Tag League Tournament.

## **FALL 1993:**

Regal faces Ric Flair in several matches contested under "Marquis De Queensbury" rules. The matches are conducted in amateur-style with rounds. Though Flair dominates the bouts, Regal wins over critics in matching Flair hold-for-hold and move-for-move.

## **APRIL 17, 1994:**

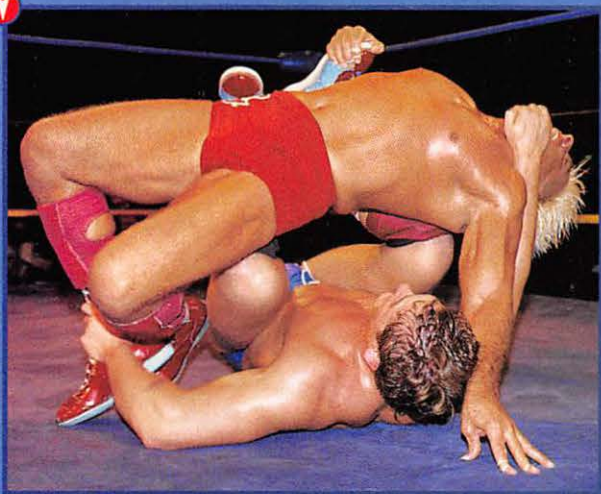
Takes "Flyin'" Brian Pillman to a 15-minute draw at Spring Stampede.

## **JUNE 23, 1994:**

Regains the TV title with a win over Zbyszko in Charleston, South Carolina.

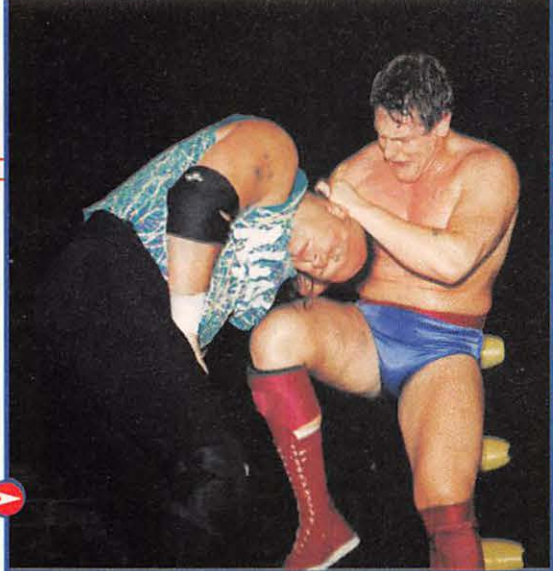
## **SEPTEMBER 18, 1994:**

Regal is relieved of the TV title for a second time, this time by Johnny B. Badd (Marc Mero) in the opening bout of Fall Brawl.





# wrestling timeline



## **JULY 16, 1995:**

Harlem Heat successfully defends the WCW World tag title against Regal and Eaton (known as The Blue Bloods) and The Nasty Boys in a three-way match at Bash at the Beach. The Blue Bloods had lost to Booker T and Stevie Ray a month earlier at The Great American Bash as well.

## **JANUARY 23, 1996:**

The Blue Bloods have a date with WCW royalty but fail miserably in a Clash of the Champions XXXII bout against Sting and Lex Luger.

## **AUGUST 20, 1996:**

Holy upset! Regal defeats Lex Luger to regain the TV title and embark on a third reign.

## **MAY 21, 1995:**

After being left off several PPV cards in favor of former WWF talent, a frustrated Regal begins to team with Bobby Eaton (who is rechristened Earl Robert Eaton). They make short work of Los Especialistas in a dark match held prior to the Slamboree PPV.

## **OCTOBER 29, 1995:**

Regal and Eaton lose to the team of Chris Benoit and Dean Malenko in a match held before the Halloween Havoc PPV.

## **MARCH 10, 1996:**

The bad blood between the Irish and the English comes to a head at WCW Uncensored when The Belfast Bruiser (a.k.a. Dave "Fit" Finlay) defeats Regal by disqualification when Earl Robert Eaton and Squire Dave Taylor interfere.



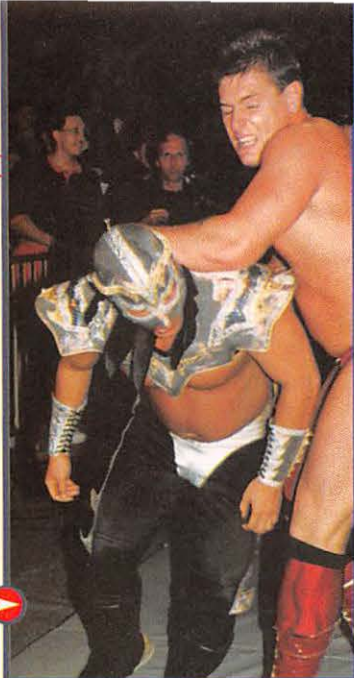


**SEPTEMBER 1996:**

Regal joins Luger, Flair, Arn Anderson, Sting, and Buff Bagwell for a Japan/U.S. all-star tournament in Japan.

**MAY 18, 1997:**

Regal wins his fourth TV title with a victory over international sensation Ultimo Dragon in the opening contest at Slamboree. Dragon would regain the title two months later.



**APRIL 1998:**

Shortly after signing with the WWF, Regal develops a serious case of pneumonia. He is hospitalized for a week.

**JANUARY 4, 1999:**

Regal checks into a drug rehabilitation program.

**FEBRUARY 17, 1997:**

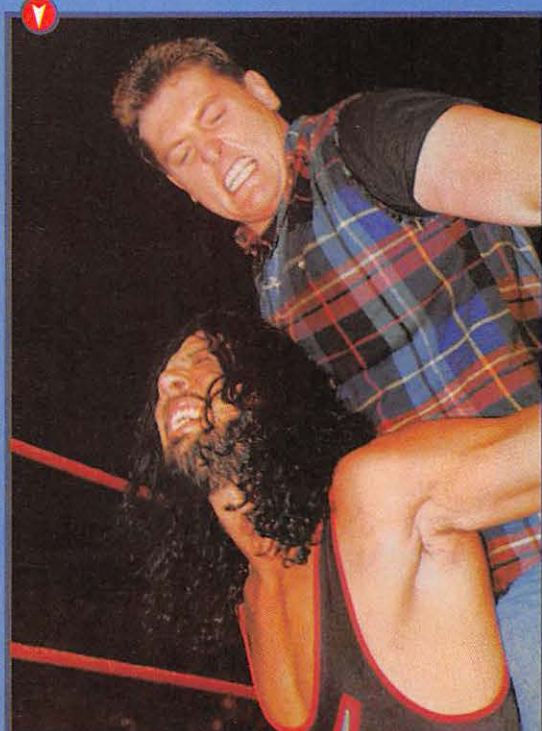
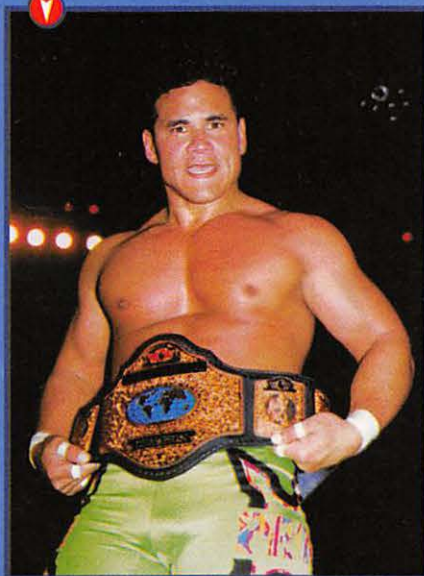
Speaking of upsets, unheralded rookie Prince Iaukea scores a huge win over Regal on *Nitro* to take the TV title.

**FEBRUARY 1998:**

After being relegated to *WCW Saturday Night* for several months, Regal puts his career on the line in a match against Hacksaw Duggan. Duggan wins the match and Regal opts to leave WCW.

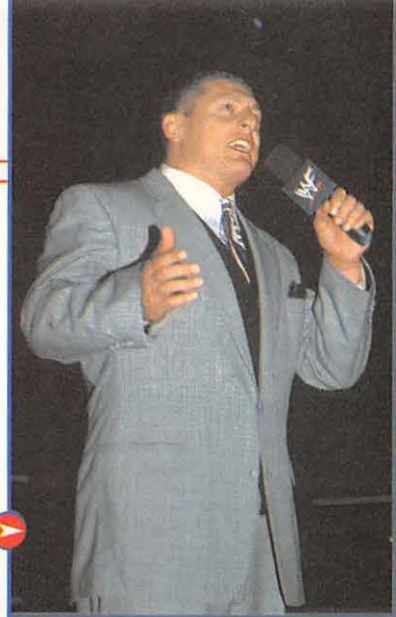
**OCTOBER 26, 1998:**

Regal finally makes his WWF debut as Steve Regal, "A Man's Man." Decked out in a flannel shirt and work boots, the image is in stark contrast to his hoity-toity Brit character from WCW. The new character fails to catch on with WWF fans, however.





# wrestling timeline



## **MARCH 1999:**

Unsatisfied with Regal's progress in rehab, the WWF releases him from his contract. Regal re-signs with WCW soon thereafter and trains up-and-coming talent at the Power Plant.

## **SEPTEMBER 18, 2000:**

Looking to be in the best shape of his life, Regal makes his first appearance as *William Regal* on *Monday Night Raw* and immediately angers fans by trying to educate them by doing such things as reading them Shakespeare.

## **NOVEMBER 19, 2000:**

In a battle between two of wrestling's toughest men, Regal beats Bob Holly by DQ to retain the European title at Survivor Series.

## **FEBRUARY 2000:**

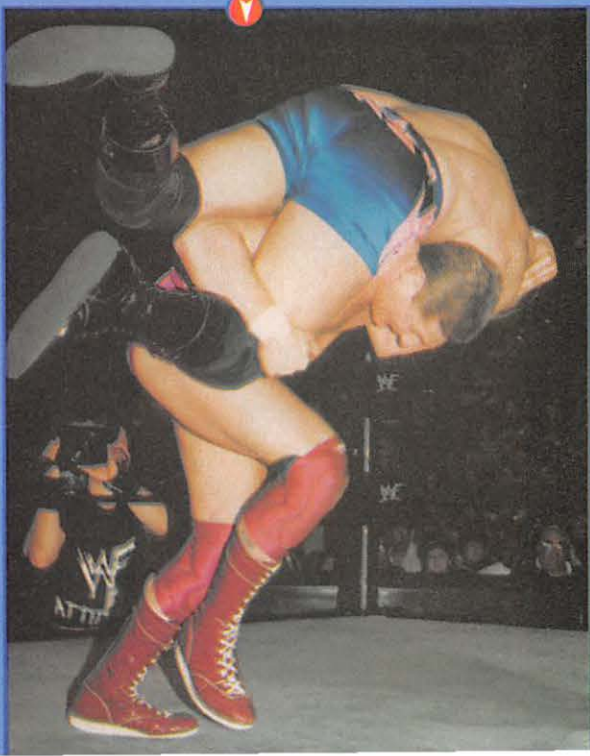
Regal is released from WCW as part of a cost-cutting move. Clean and sober, he is re-signed by the WWF and assigned to Memphis Championship Wrestling for conditioning.

## **OCTOBER 16, 2000:**

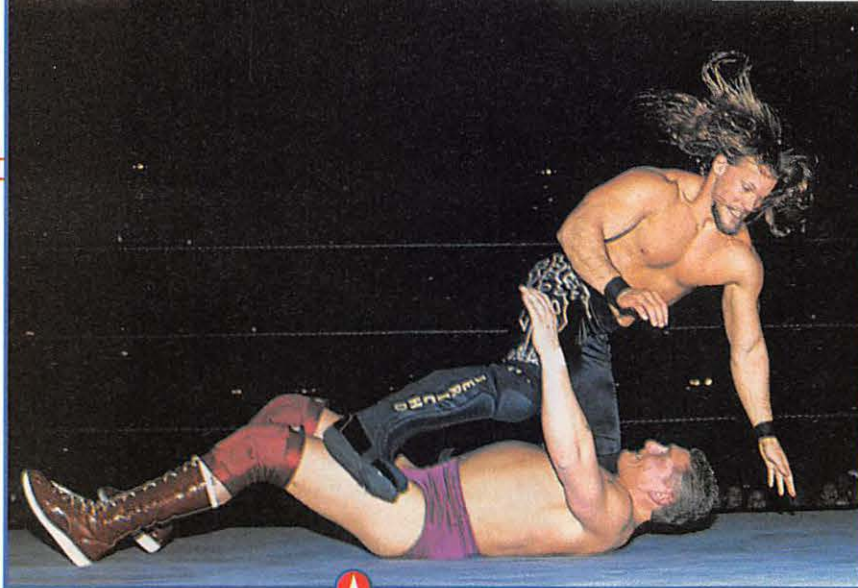
Defeats Al Snow to win the WWF European title in Detroit, Michigan.

## **DECEMBER 2, 2000:**

Crash Holly ruins Regal's homecoming, winning the European title in Sheffield, England. Regal regains the belt two days later on *Raw* in East Rutherford, New Jersey.







**JANUARY 22, 2001:**

Regal drops the European title to Test in Lafayette, Louisiana.

**APRIL 29, 2001:**

Defeats Chris Jericho in a bizarre "Duchess Of Queensbury" match at Backlash.

**OCTOBER 8, 2001:**

Who knew Regal still had loyalty to WCW? He surprises everyone by interfering in a WWF title match between Kurt Angle and Steve Austin, helping Austin (then a part of the WCW/ECW Alliance) steal the gold. Linda McMahon fires Regal as commissioner the following night.

**MARCH 8, 2001:**

The Blackpool native wins a title of a different kind, defeating Snow on *Smackdown* to be named WWF commissioner.

**MAY 20, 2001:**

Stinkface be damned! Regal defeats Rikishi at Judgment Day. A few days later, he brings Tajiri on board as his manservant/lackey. They would develop into a hilarious duo.

**NOVEMBER 4, 2001:**

Defeats cruiserweight champ (and former pal) Tajiri in a non-title match at Rebellion in Manchester, England. He would also defeat Tajiri in a non-title bout exactly two weeks later at Survivor Series.







## **NOVEMBER 19, 2001:**

Vince McMahon inducts the very first member of his new "Kiss My Ass" club, and guess who that man is! Regal actually smooches McMahon's bare backside in order to retain his job in light of the demise of the Alliance the previous night at Survivor Series.

## **MARCH 17, 2002:**

Rob Van Dam defeats Regal to win the I-C title in the opener at WrestleMania X8.

## **APRIL 8, 2002:**

Spike Dudley upsets Regal to win the European title in Phoenix, Arizona. Regal would regain the title less than a month later.

## **DECEMBER 9, 2001:**

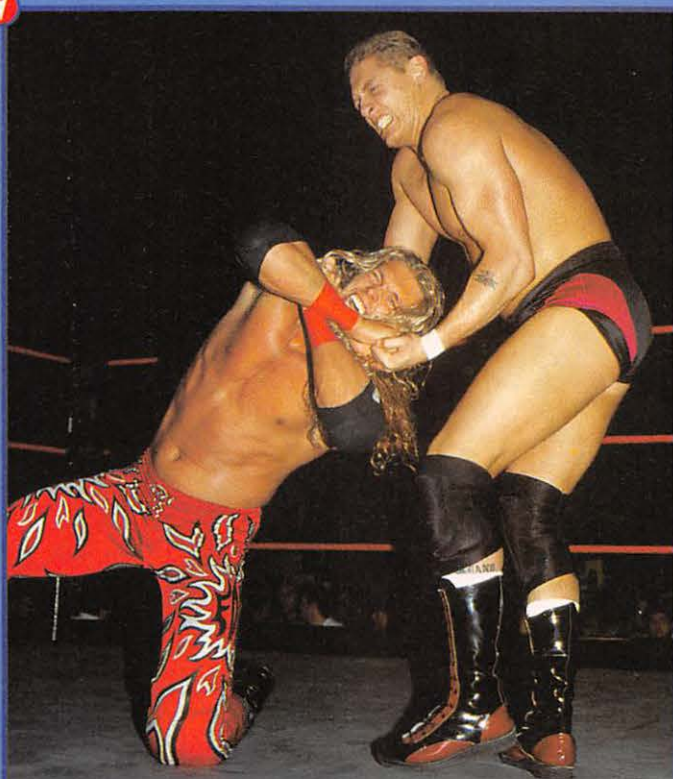
Intercontinental champion Edge defeats Regal at Vengeance, breaking Regal's nose in the process. A very serious Regal swears revenge.

## **JANUARY 20, 2002:**

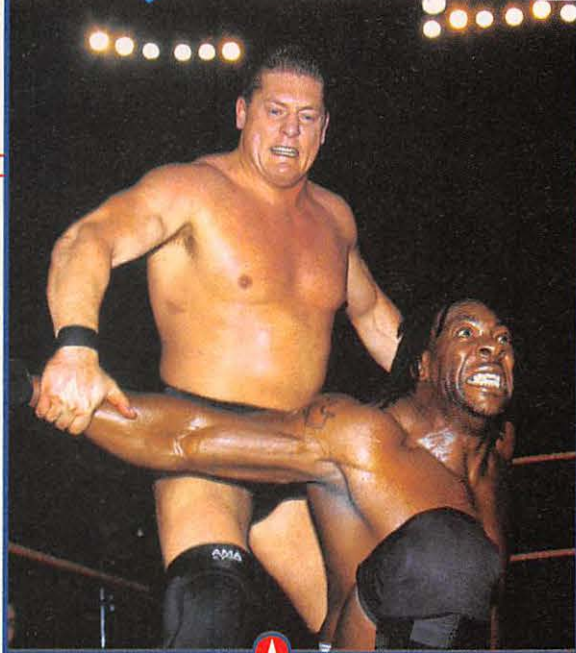
Makes good on his promise, beating Edge with the help of a pair of brass knuckles, his weapon of choice, at the Royal Rumble.

## **MARCH 19, 2002:**

Regal rebounds from the I-C title loss by beating "Diamond" Dallas Page to regain the European title.







### ***JULY 8, 2002:***

Regal drops the European title for the last time with a loss to Jeff Hardy.

### ***JANUARY 6, 2003:***

Un-Americans Regal and Storm defeat Booker T and Goldust to win the Raw tag title.

### ***MARCH 24, 2003:***

Due to a heart ailment that would have made it dangerous for him to continue to wrestle, Regal is sidelined from action. He and Storm are stripped of the tag title. Sean "Chief" Morley (Val Venis), Raw GM Eric Bischoff's chief of staff, names himself and Storm the new tag champs.

### ***SEPTEMBER 22, 2002:***

Regal joins Lance Storm, Test, and Christian in The Un-Americans, but The Un-Americans are humbled by Booker T, Buh Buh Ray Dudley, Goldust, and Kane in an eight-man tag match at Unforgiven.

### ***JANUARY 19, 2003:***

Regal and Storm drop the gold to the Dudleys at the Royal Rumble but regain them the following night on *Raw*.

### ***APRIL 5, 2004:***

After many observers had proclaimed Regal's career over (again), he returns to *Raw* and agrees to manage Eric Bischoff's "nephew," Eugene (Nick) Dinsmore. He is also cleared to wrestle again.





# > WRESTLING COLLECTORS!

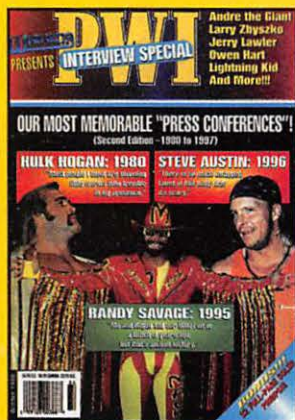
## Do you know what you're missing?



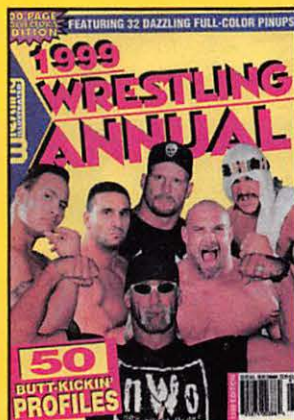
**PWI INTERVIEW SPECIAL (Vol. I)**  
One select "Press Conference" since 1979, PWI's first year. Scott Hall, Bruno Sammartino, Dallas Page, Kevin Von Erich, Ric Flair, and more! 32 color pinups!



**1998 WRESTLING ANNUAL**  
Butt-kickin', attitude-laced profiles, plus a look at what the future holds for wrestling's top superstars. 32 color pinups!



**PWI INTERVIEW SPECIAL (Vol. II)**  
One "Press Conference" for each year since 1980, including Hogan, Andre, Cactus, Austin, Sting, and more! 32 color pinups!



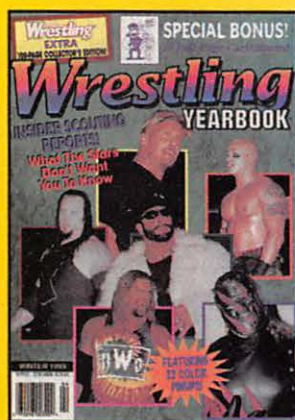
**1999 WRESTLING ANNUAL**  
More cutting-edge profiles of the stars, including a glimpse into their futures. 32 color pinups!



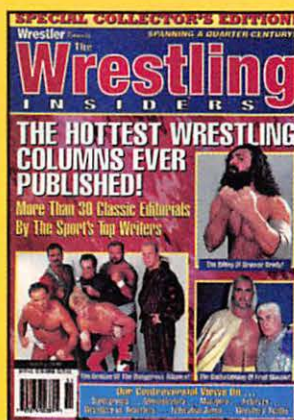
**WRESTLING INSIDERS (Winter '99)**  
Go back through the years with wrestling's most respected columnists, including Dan Shocket, Eddie Ellner, and Stu Saks.



**PWI INTERVIEW SPECIAL (Vol. III)**  
One "Press Conference" for each year since 1980, including Michaels, Sting, Flair, Ventura, Kimberly, Blaxie, Luger, and more! 32 color pinups!

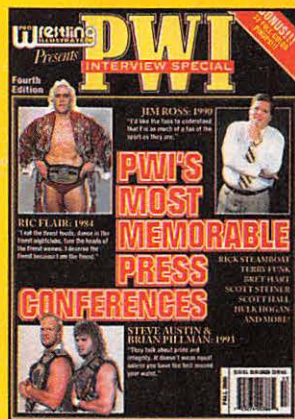


**1999 WRESTLING YEARBOOK**  
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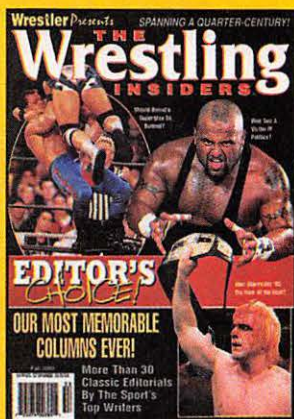
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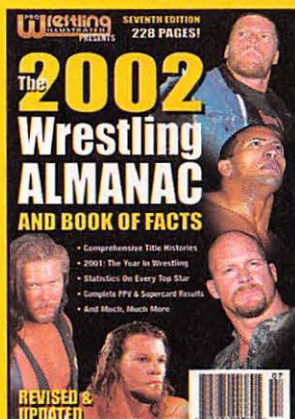
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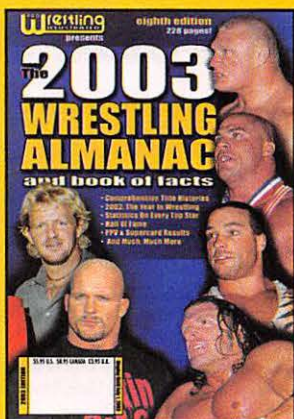
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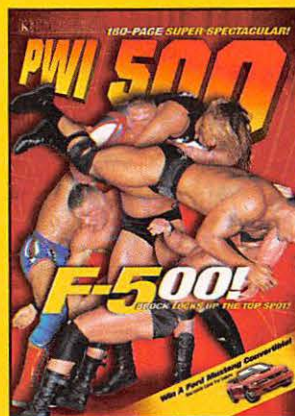
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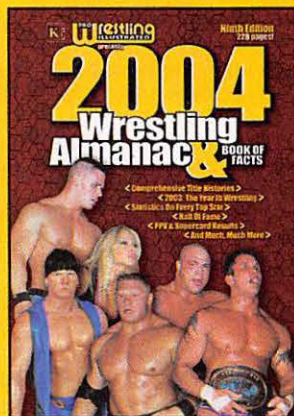
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# roll call of champions

**For period ended April 30, 2004**

**ALL-JAPAN INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:** KAZ HAYASHI & SATOSHI KOJIMA  
(January 18, 2004; from Keiji Muto & Arashi; Osaka, Japan)

**ALL-JAPAN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:** KAZ HAYASHI  
(February 22, 2004; beat Taka Michinoku; Tokyo, Japan)

**ALL-JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION:** TOSHIKI KAWADA  
(September 6, 2003; beat Shinjiro Ohtani in tournament final; Tokyo, Japan)

**BORDER CITY WRESTLING CAN-AM HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:** SHANE DOUGLAS  
(October 14, 2003; from D-Lo Brown; Belleville, MI)

**BORDER CITY WRESTLING TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:** GUTTER & HACKER  
(May 27, 2003; from Tyson Dux & El Tornado; Oldcastle, Ontario)

**EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:**  
**CHRISTOPHER DANIELS**  
(April 3, 2004; from Mike Krueh; Wilmington, DE)

**EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION MID-ATLANTIC CHAMPION:** ACE DARLING  
(February 28, 2004; from Prince Nana; Wilmington, DE)

**EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:** THE VALEDICTORIANS  
(November 8, 2003; from Joey & Johnny Maxx; Wilmington, DE)

**HEARTLAND WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:** RORY FOX  
(March 30, 2004; from El Temor; Cincinnati, OH)

**HEARTLAND WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:**  
T.J. DALTON & J.T. STAHR  
(February 10, 2004; from Crazy J & Lotus; Cincinnati, OH)

**IWA MID-SOUTH HARDCORE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:** JERRY LYNN  
(January 16, 2004; from Danny Daniels; Oolitic, IN)

**IWA MID-SOUTH LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:** MATT SYDAL  
(January 17, 2004; from J.C. Bailey; Highland, IN)

**IWF AMERICAN CHAMPION:** BRANDON YOUNG  
(November 22, 2003; from Shawn Donovan; West Paterson, NJ)

**IWF HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:** ROMAN  
(January 17, 2004; from Fred Sampson; West Paterson, NJ)

**IWF TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:** TRAVIS BLAKE & SHAWN DONOVAN  
(March 13, 2004; from Biggie Biggs & Eloy Fiesta; Middletown, NJ)

**IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:** BOB SAPP  
(March 28, 2004; from Kensuke Sasaki; Tokyo, Japan)

**IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:**  
MINORU SUZUKI & YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA  
(February 1, 2004; from Osamu Nishimura & Hiroyoshi Tenzan; Sapporo, Japan)

**IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:** HEAT  
(December 14, 2003; from Jado; Nagoya, Japan)

**NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:** A.J. STYLES  
(April 21, 2004; from Jeff Jarrett; Nashville, TN)

**NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:** KID KASH & DALLAS  
(April 21, 2004; from D-Lo Brown & Apollo; Nashville, TN)

**NWA FLORIDA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:** TODD SHANE  
(March 20, 2004; from Steve Madison; St. Petersburg, FL)

**NWA FLORIDA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:** FAHRENHEIT 420  
(April 17, 2004; Stash & David Mercury; Brandon, FL)

**NWA SOUTHWEST TEXAS HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:** AL JACKSON  
(September 20, 2003; from J.P. Black; Dallas, TX)

**NWA SOUTHWEST TEXAS TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:** HALLOWMASS  
(November 26, 2003; from Harley Johnson & Hugh Rogue; Tyler, TX)

**NWA-TNA X CHAMPION:** FRANKIE KAZARIAN  
(March 31, 2004; beat Amazing Red for vacant title; Nashville, TN)

**OHIO VALLEY WRESTLING HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:** MATT MORGAN  
(April 14, 2004; from Nick Dinsmore; Louisville, KY)

**OHIO VALLEY WRESTLING SOUTHERN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:**  
**BRENT ALBRIGHT & CHRIS MASTERS**  
(March 31, 2004; from Chris Cage & Tank Toland; Louisville, KY)

**PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN CHAMPION:** KENTA KOBASHI  
(March 1, 2003; from Mitsuharu Misawa; Tokyo, Japan)

**PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:**  
JUSHIN LIGER  
(January 4, 2004; from Takashi Sugiura; Tokyo, Japan)

**PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:**  
MITSUOHARU MISAWA & YOSHINARI OGAWA  
(January 10, 2004; from Yuji Nagata & Hiroshi Tanahashi; Tokyo, Japan)

**RING OF HONOR CHAMPION:** SAMOA JOE  
(March 22, 2003; from Xavier; Philadelphia, PA)

**RING OF HONOR TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:** COLT CABANA & C.M. PUNK  
(April 24, 2004; from Jay & Mark Briscoe; Chicago Ridge, IL)

**WWE CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPION:** CHAVO GUERRERO JR.  
(February 15, 2004; from Rey Mysterio Jr.; San Francisco, CA)

**WWE INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION:** RANDY ORTON  
(December 14, 2003; from Rob Van Dam; Orlando, FL)

**WWE RAW CHAMPION:** CHRIS BENOIT  
(March 14, 2004; from Triple-H; New York, NY)

**WWE RAW TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:** CHRIS BENOIT & EDGE  
(April 19, 2004; from Batista & Ric Flair; Calgary, Alberta)

**WWE SMACKDOWN CHAMPION:** EDDIE GUERRERO  
(February 15, 2004; from Brock Lesnar; San Francisco, CA)

**WWE SMACKDOWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:** CHARLIE HAAS & RICO  
(April 20, 2004; from Rikishi & Scotty Too Hotty; Kelowna, British Columbia)

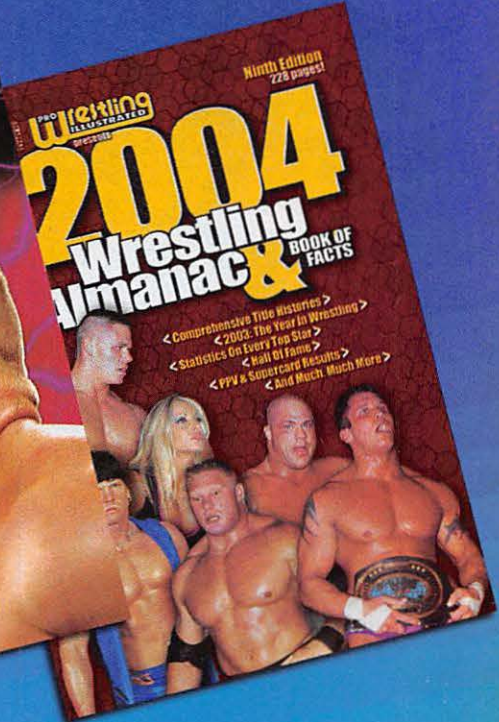
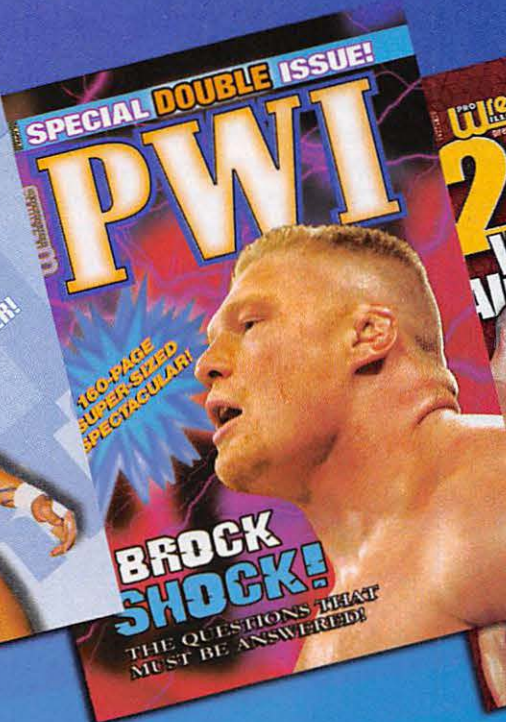
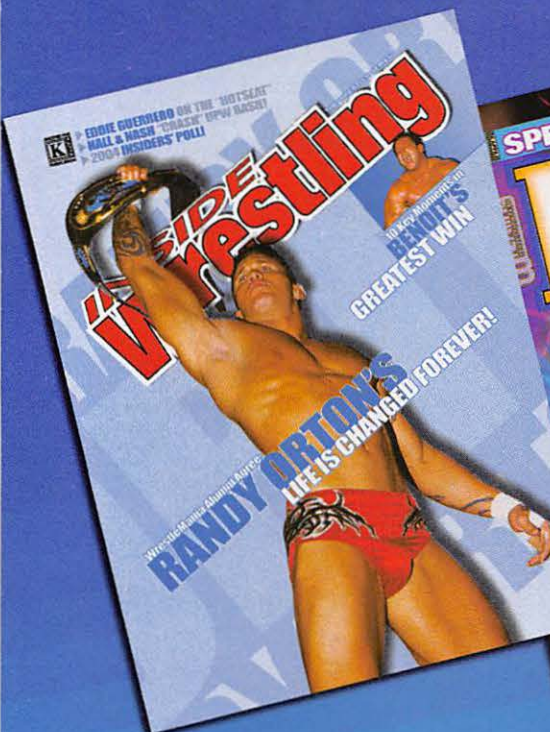
**WWE U.S. CHAMPION:** JOHN CENA  
(March 14, 2004; from The Big Show; New York, NY)

**WWE WOMEN'S CHAMPION:** VICTORIA  
(February 23, 2004; from Molly Holly; Omaha, NE)

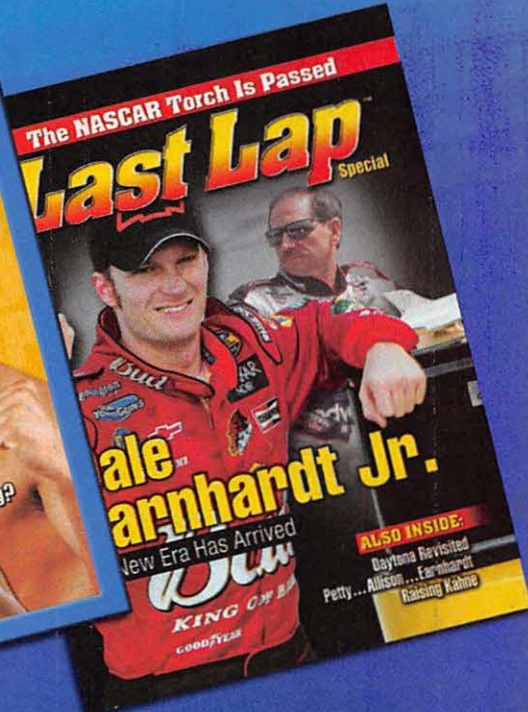
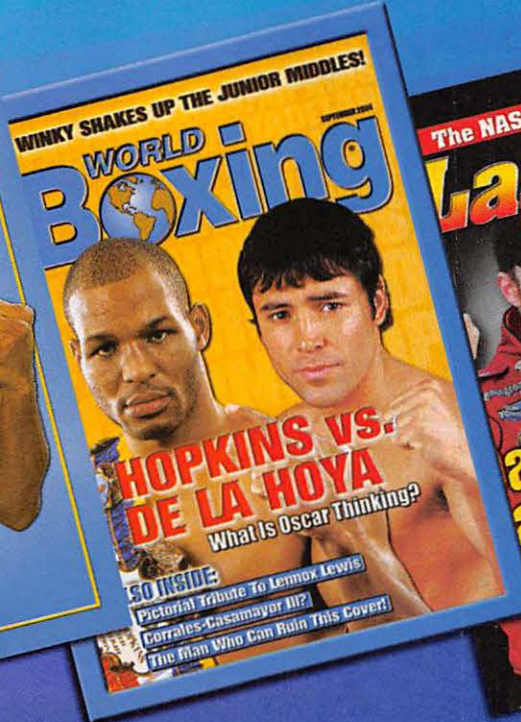
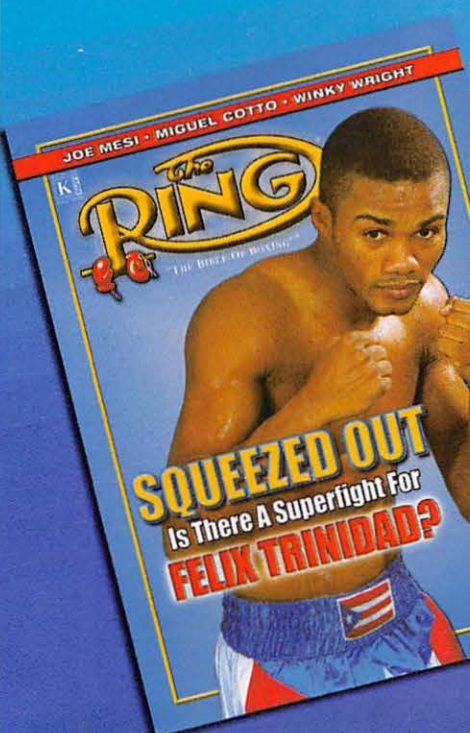
**WORLD XTREME WRESTLING HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION:** MANA THE POLYNESIAN WARRIOR  
(March 28, 2004; from Gene Snitsky; Mountainville, PA)

**WORLD XTREME WRESTLING TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:** NUISANCE & SUGAA  
(March 12, 2004; from The Untouchables; Sciota, PA)





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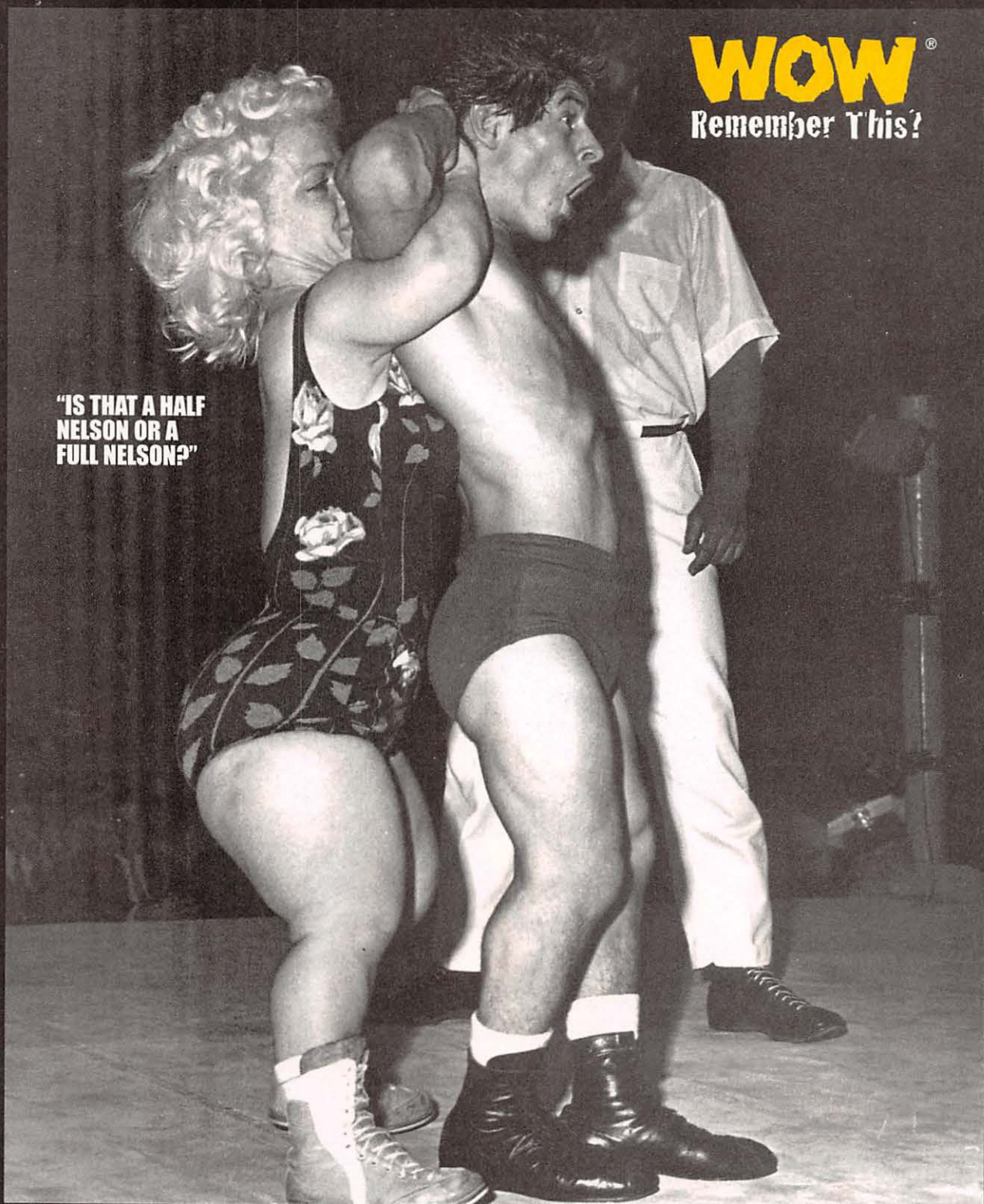


## DARLING DAGMAR vs. FRENCHY LAMONTE February 1965

There was nothing quite like a midget mixed tag team match if you were a wrestling fan four decades ago. In addition to Miss Dagmar and Mr. Lamonte, this one also featured Lord Littlebrook (Dagmar's partner) and Diamond Lil (Lamonte's partner). Male on female violence in the ring wasn't nearly as common back then as it is today, and the rules dictated that there were to be no exchanges between the men and the women in a showdown such as this. Dagmar apparently didn't hold certain rules in high regard. This definitely qualifies as female on male violence! And Lamonte must not have realized Dagmar was such a powerhouse. He ultimately needed the referee's help in breaking the hold. For the record, Dagmar and Littlebrook won the match.

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NELSON OR A  
FULL NELSON?"





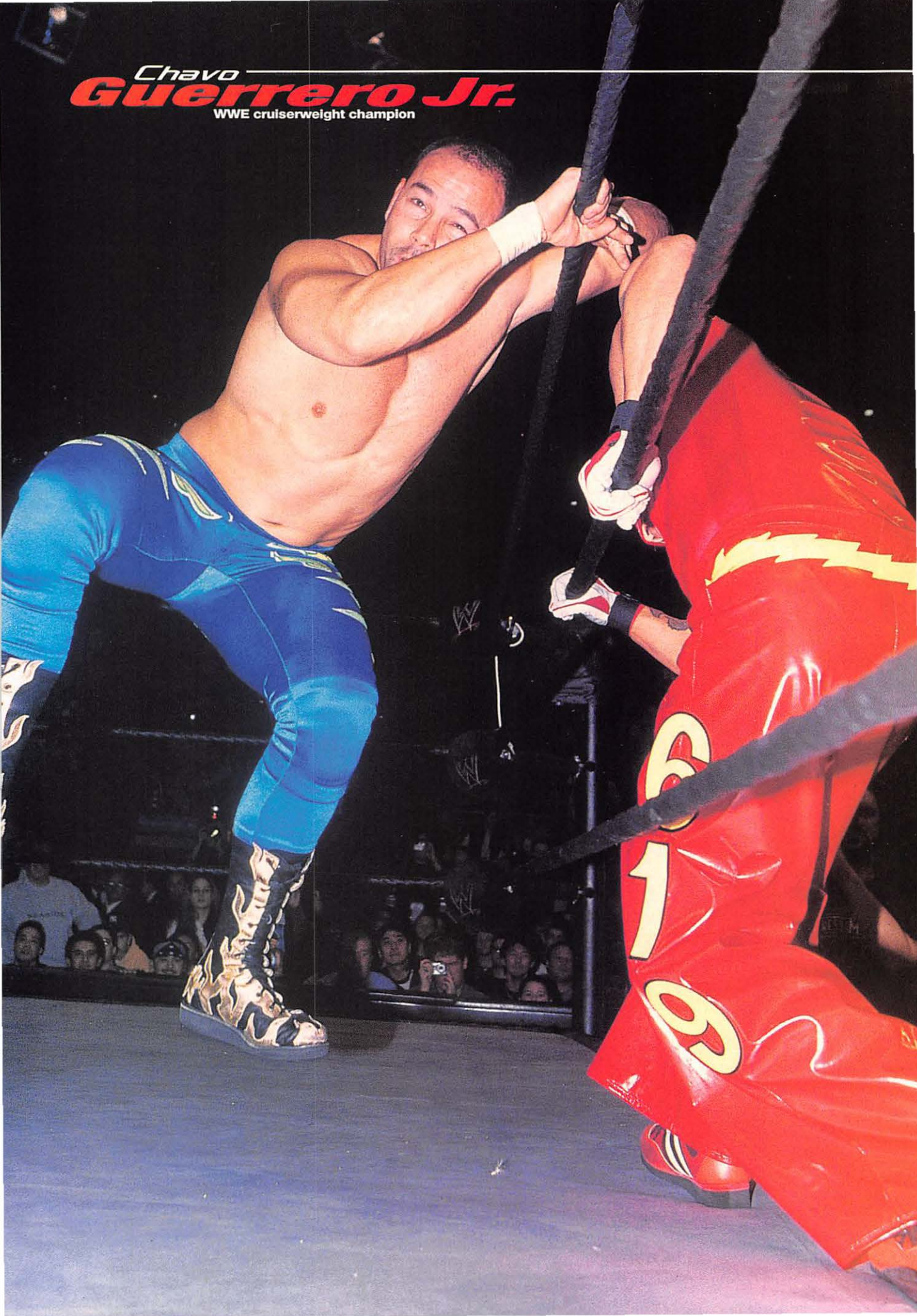
*Eddie*  
**Guerrero**  
WWE Smackdown champion





*Chavo*  
**Guerrero Jr.**

WWE cruiserweight champion



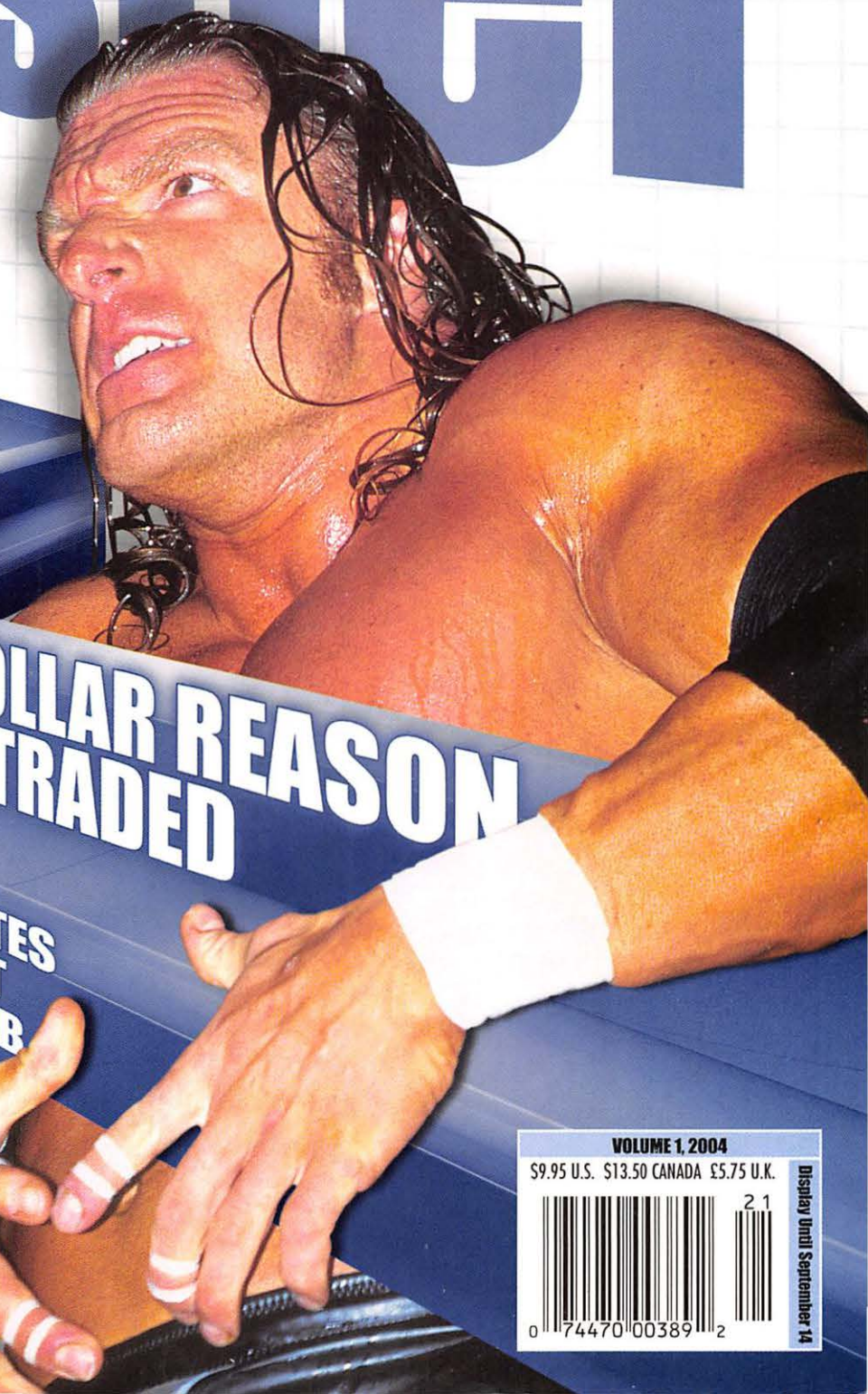


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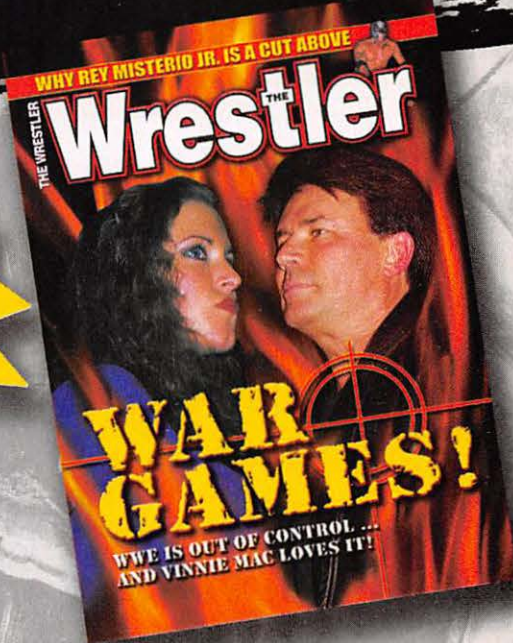
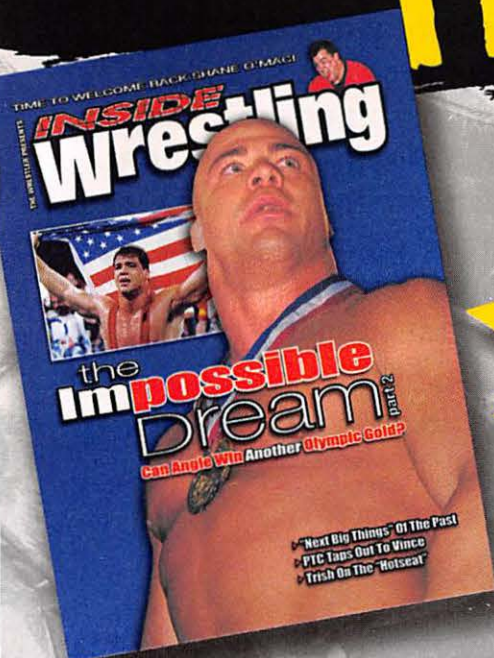
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# contents

Volume 1, 2004

## DEPARTMENTS

**M**cDONALD'S MAY HAVE been looking out for the human condition when it decided to withdraw the option to "super size." We, on the other hand, have decided to go in the opposite direction. As far as London Publishing is concerned, you can never have too much of a good thing, so we're embarking on an experiment that's never been done before in the annals of publishing:

We've formed the first magazine tag team!

*"From Ambler, Pennsylvania, at a combined 164 pages and 74 years in the business, the team of THE WRESTLER and INSIDE WRESTLING!"*

The histories of THE WRESTLER and INSIDE WRESTLING have always been intertwined. Stanley Weston founded THE WRESTLER in 1966 and, based on its phenomenal success, followed up with INSIDE WRESTLING two years later. Combo subscriptions to the sister publications have been available at various points in time, and for a good many years, subscribers received the two magazines in one package.

But never have they been joined at the spine. Until now, of course. Turn the magazine one way and you're reading THE WRESTLER; flip it over and you're reading INSIDE WRESTLING! There hasn't been a better combination since the woman carrying the jar of peanut butter bumped into the man carrying the chocolate bar and the two simultaneously came up with the idea to market peanut butter cups!

Now, we're not expecting to change the world, the way this man and woman (who would later marry as Mr. and Mrs. Reese) did, but we do think we can shake things up a little in the wrestling magazine business. Mind you, TW and INW aren't going to be a tag team all year round. Most of the time, you'll still see them as singles. But twice a year, they'll reunite, with twice as much to read at a couple less bucks than they would cost if purchased separately.

And we don't have to worry about lawsuits accusing us of making the nation fat, unlike the folks under the Golden Arches.

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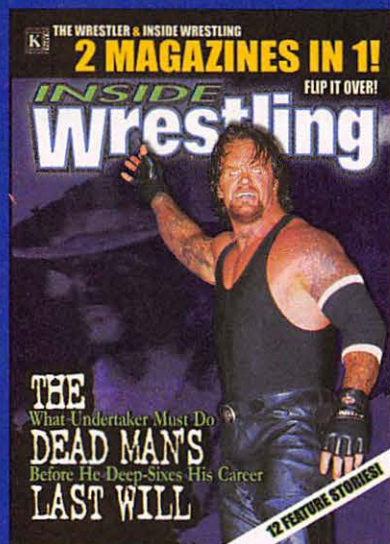
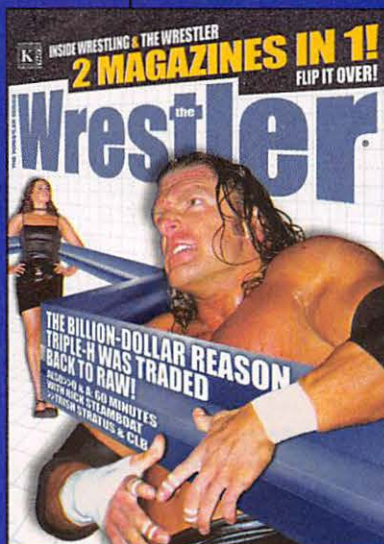
Triple-H by Duane Long  
Stephanie McMahon  
by Mark Hill

### COVER DESIGN:

Greg Stevens

### COVER DESIGN:

Jim Malloy



Look for the October 2004 issue of THE WRESTLER on sale July 13, 2004



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Ten years after he retired from active competition, we sit down with "The Dragon" for an extended interview. He puts his career in perspective, discusses what he's doing today, and offers thoughts on Ric Flair, Steve Austin, wrestling today, psychology, a possible comeback, and much, much more

### 48 ENJOY TRISH WHILE YOU CAN, CLB! SHE'S GOING TO MAKE YOU SORRY YOU WERE BORN!

He can't really expect this relationship to last, can he?

### 52 THE BILLION-DOLLAR REASON TRIPLE-H WAS TRADED BACK TO RAW!

Just think of a woman with "billion-dollar" in her nickname

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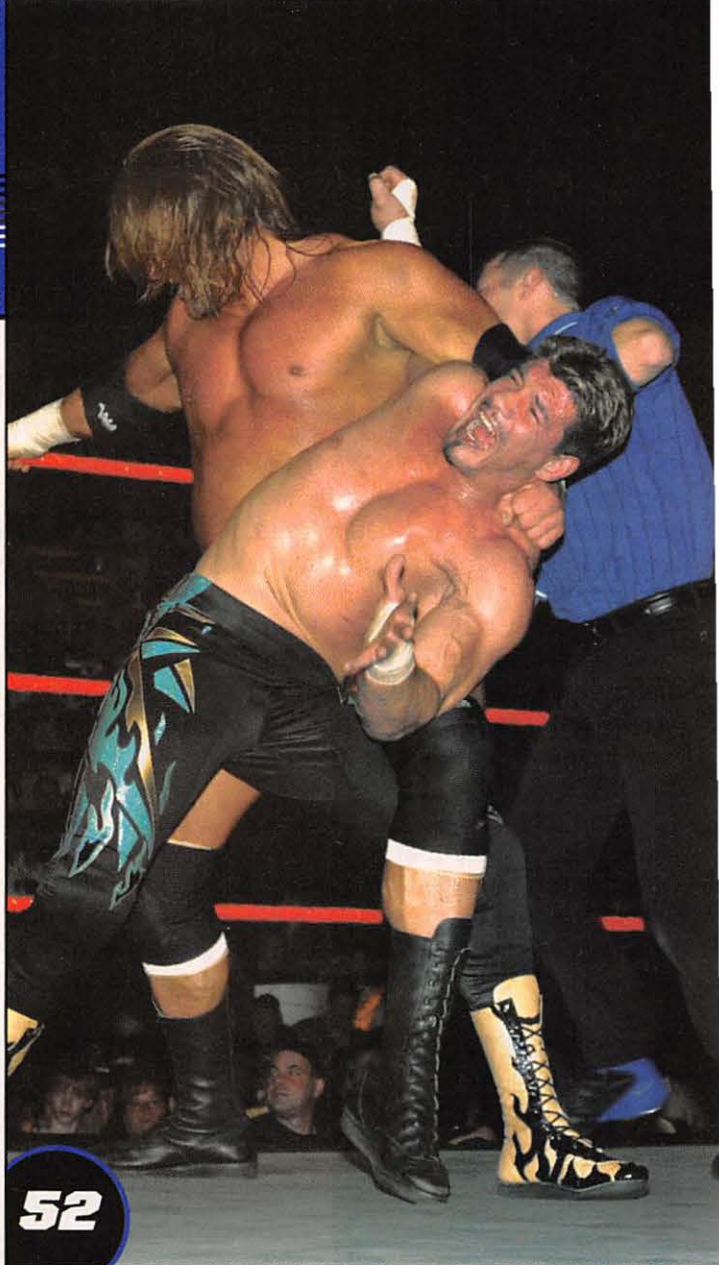
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Takes on the Super 8 from a veteran and an up-and-comer





# your letters

## SUPERSTAR SHELTON

I was really impressed by Shelton Benjamin's performance in a gauntlet series on *Smackdown* a few months ago. He defeated his old *Smackdown* partner, Charlie Haas, and then veteran Billy Gunn before being beaten by Rey Mysterio Jr. I don't know if a gauntlet match is necessarily fair, since the winning competitor has to keep wrestling fresh opponents, but Benjamin sure made an excellent showing for himself.

Now that he has been drafted by Raw, beaten Triple-H in his first televised match, and split from Haas, I think Benjamin will have a lot more chances to show his stuff. He has tangled with Chris Benoit on many

occasions before and could prove to be a real threat to the Raw title.

STEPHEN ANTHONY  
Dayton, OH

## GIVE HIM RVD vs. A.J.

I'm 15 years old and have just started training for a career in wrestling. In doing so, I realized how difficult wrestling really is. I began to have a higher respect for the athletes I watch in WWE, NWA-TNA, and elsewhere.

These men pull off so many amazing moves with such ease that the fans seem to lose interest and become more concerned with Kane's car wrecks. I'm very disappointed with how the WWE is handling Rob Van Dam, who in my mind

is the best wrestler in the world.

I have a tape of ECW's Guilty as Charged 2000, during which RVD defends the TV title against hardcore icon Sabu. That is by far my favorite match of all-time. The hardcore element mixed with excellent wrestling really got my blood pumping. But RVD has had to settle for life in the mid-card in WWE. That is why I have such great respect for A.J. Styles. Turning down a WWE contract was the best option for him. Now I get to tune in every Wednesday and watch a smaller but phenomenal athlete compete for the NWA heavyweight championship. And while I'm watching main events in WWE involving Triple-H, I know I would be happier watching RVD and A.J. Styles in a singles match.

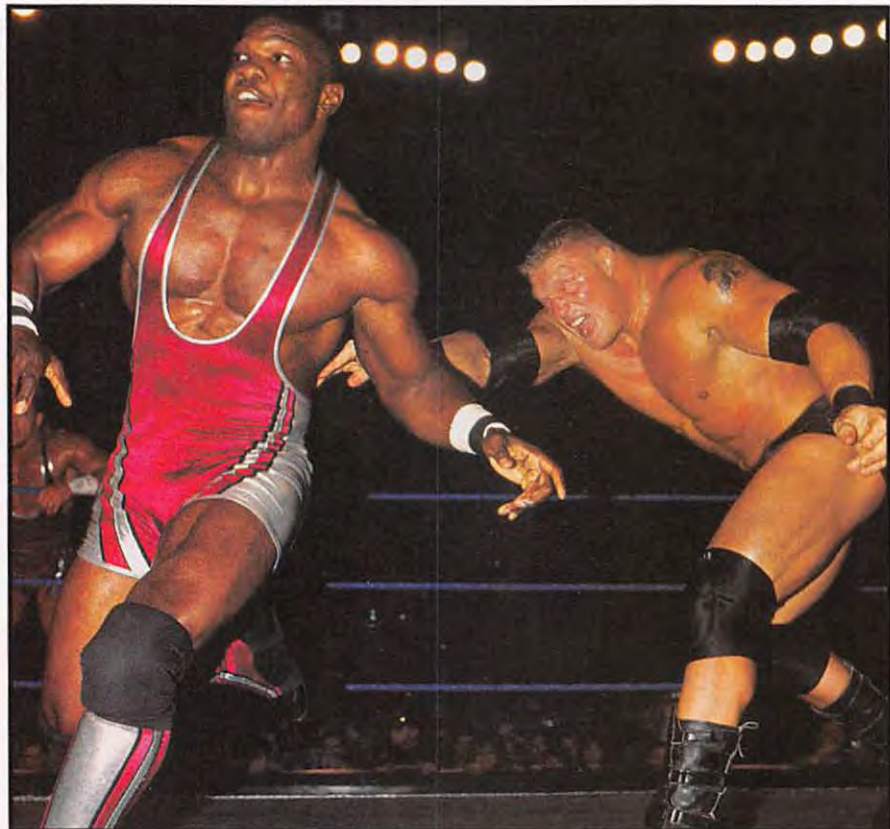
RYAN YOUNG

ryan\_redhead\_young@hotmail.com

## CATCH THE A-TRAIN!

I wish everyone would quit treating A-Train like a joke. Okay, so the guy has ridiculous entrance music. So what if he refuses to shave his back hair, despite all the chants he hears whenever he wrestles! And so what if he just looks a little strange overall and isn't the most charismatic athlete in the world! All that just prevents a lot of people from being able to notice what I've known since I watched him in WWE's developmental program in Memphis years ago: The guy is a really underrated wrestler.

My prediction is that the switch from Raw to *Smackdown* will be the best thing that's ever happened to his career. It might take a while, but I see him at least getting into contention for the Intercontinental title. He'll have a chance to stand out more with Raw because there aren't as many huge wrestlers (Big Show,



Shelton Benjamin never got much of an opportunity for singles action against Brock Lesnar or anyone else with *Smackdown*, but reader Stephen Anthony likes his chances with Raw.



Undertaker, Bradshaw) as there are on Smackdown.

MARK LAMMERS  
Dyer, TN

## MISSING THE PRINCESS

No offense to Kurt Angle (whom I love watching in any role) and Paul Heyman (who did a better job as Smackdown GM than I thought he would), but I'd like to see Stephanie McMahon return to TV and get another chance in that position. I never really got interested in her feud with her father last fall because I was just so sick of seeing McMaho's feud with each other, but I do miss seeing her on *Smackdown* every Thursday night. I can't really see her coming back as a manager or wrestler, but maybe Vince could have her and Angle work as co-GMs of that brand. I thought it worked pretty well when Steve Austin and Eric Bischoff were co-GMs of Raw. Maybe I'll regret writing this one day, but it's time to bring back Steph!

JON WILSON  
Syracuse, NY



A lot of people thought Stephanie McMahon (shown with The Undertaker) was overexposed on WWE TV last fall. Reader Jon Wilson can't wait for her return!



Stop laughing at A-Train and start appreciating his talent, writes Mark Lammers. Mark thinks Train might just be I-C title material.

## AUSTIN STILL ROCKS

In the May 2004 issue, reader Curt Dawkins wrote that "Stone-Cold" has come back too many times. Steve Austin is one of the top stars in WWE, and if he wants to keep coming back, he will.

In the storied history of "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin, there is very little "The Rattlesnake" has not done. Not only has Austin held nearly every title a WWE competitor could hold, he did so with a style that made him perhaps the greatest WWE superstar to ever enter the ring. Although he retired as an active wrestler after WrestleMania XIX, Austin reinvented himself as the co-GM of Raw, and his popularity remained the same.

Austin is and will continue to be a trash-talking, beer-swilling, finger-gesturing, butt-kicking S.O.B. ... and he and the millions of WWE fans around the world would not have it any other way! If anyone wants to say otherwise, watch out for a Stone-Cold stunner!

CHRIS HILLA  
Wayne, NJ

(Continued on page 75)

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# what's happening?

By Dan Murphy

**T**HE WINNER OF the much-ballyhooed rematch between NWA heavyweight champion Jeff Jarrett and "Wildcat" Chris Harris turned out to be ... **A.J. Styles**.

Furious that Harris was given the

title match over him, **Raven** attacked Harris early on the April 21 pay-per-view, severely injuring Harris' arm and preventing him from facing Jarrett later that night. After much consideration, NWA TNA Director of Authority

**Vince Russo**

gave former champion Styles the nod, and Styles went on to pin Jarrett in a steel cage match to recapture the title.

Styles' win capped a bizarre series of events that took place throughout March and April. Harris, Styles, Raven, **Abyss**, and **Ron Killings** all seemingly qualified for shots at the NWA title in previous weeks. Styles was the only one to actually get a title shot, and all the others have a valid argument for being the top contender to the NWA title. The confusion surrounding the NWA title has led to considerable criticism of Russo in the TNA locker room.

"I don't get it. You win a match to be named top contender

and so do four other guys," Killings—himself a former NWA champion—said. "Russo might be trying to do the right thing, but he has all of us fighting each other, and most of us aren't getting the title shot we thought we earned. I'm going to have to take matters into my own hands real soon."

Styles' win could be great news for TNA. He is widely considered to be one of the most innovative, exciting, and marketable young stars in wrestling. However, it remains to be seen if TNA officials—and Russo—will give Styles a legitimate chance to shine, or if the bait-and-switch tactic indicated a return to the Crash TV approach Russo used in WCW. In my opinion, TNA's best bet is to put all its power behind Styles, **Christopher Daniels**, **Frankie Kazarian**, and **Michael Shane**, who are four of the most talented young lions in the game.

Speaking of Daniels, "The Fallen Angel" had a career night on April 3. Not only did he defeat **Rocky Romero**, **Mike Krueh**, and **Austin Aries** to win the 2004 Super 8 Tournament (becoming the first man to ever win the tournament twice, as he also won in 2000), but he also walked away with the ECWA heavyweight title. After losing to Daniels in the semifinals, Krueh graciously handed the championship belt to Daniels, even though the title was not on the line.

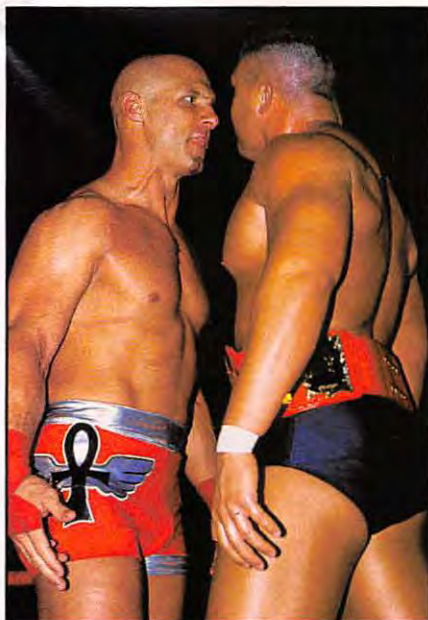
"I take pride in being a fighting champion," Krueh said later that night. "Daniels pinned my shoulders to the mat. As far as I'm concerned, that gives him every right to wear that belt. If I didn't give it to him, I don't think I'd be able to sleep at night."

Both Daniels and Styles, meanwhile, find themselves at the center of the dispute between NWA-TNA and Ring of Honor. For the past two years, Styles and Daniels (and several other wrestlers) have been working for both



About a half-dozen stars were in line for a shot at Jeff Jarrett's NWA heavyweight title in late-April, but it was A.J. Styles who won the belt for a second time by beating Jarrett inside a steel cage. This happened on a night that Styles wasn't scheduled for a title match.





Chris Daniels and Mike Krueger were in each other's faces before their Super 8 semifinal match in April. Even though Krueger's ECWA title wasn't on the line in their tournament match, he gave it to Daniels after losing to him anyway.

promotions. But TNA recently announced that it has pulled its talent from upcoming ROH shows. There has been considerable debate over whether this is because of the recent scandal involving former ROH co-owner **Rob Feinstein** or the fact that TNA is close to finalizing a TV deal with FoxSports Net and it considers ROH to be competition. Perhaps it's a little of both.

The ROH Web site addressed the situation and noted that "communication will remain open between TNA and ROH, and hopefully this issue can be resolved down the line." After speaking with several people close to the situation, I got the sense that they are cautiously optimistic that the dispute will be resolved soon.

Need proof that opposites attract? The surprise team of **Charlie Haas** and **Rico** defeated **Rikishi** and **Scotty Too Hotty** to win the Smackdown tag team title on April 20. Ironically, Rico last held the tag title with Rikishi as his partner back in 2002 (and also didn't get along with him). Given that Haas apparently has eyes for **Miss Jackie** and really can't stand Rico, this little love triangle has the potential to get ... intriguing, to say the least.

An interesting rumor making the

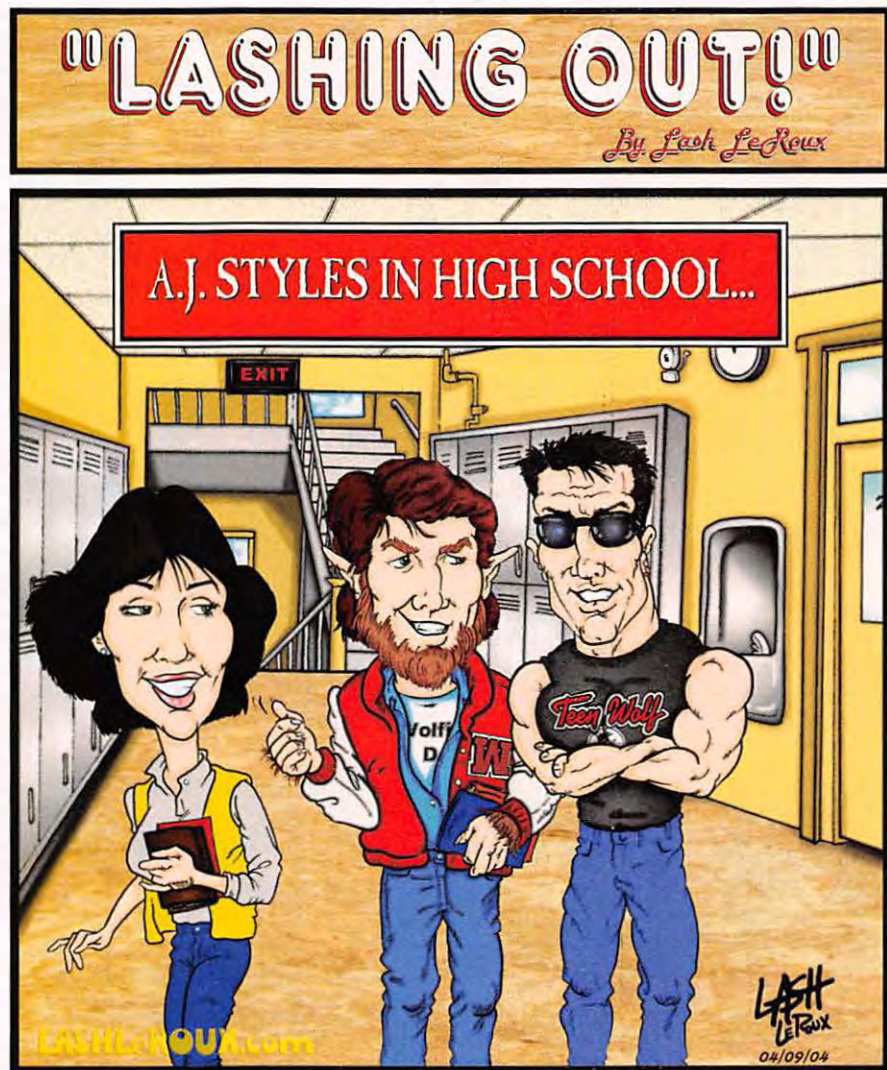
rounds on the Internet is that **Ted Turner** is looking at creating a new wrestling promotion to compete with WWE. Rumor has it that Turner's people have contacted both Goldberg and **Steve Austin** to gauge their interest, but those reports have not been confirmed. There is apparently a no-compete in regard to wrestling programming in place between AOL Time Warner and WWE that expires in March 2006, so even if this story had legs, TBS and TNT would not be viable options at this point. Still, stranger things have happened. We'll keep an eye on this.

Dateline: Stamford, Connecticut. **Jim Ross** has given up his duties as head of talent relations. Ross has accepted a promotion within the company and will work directly with **Vince Mc-**

**Mahon** on all facets of the wrestling business. **John Laurinaitis** (who used to wrestle as **Johnny Ace**) has replaced Ross as head of talent relations.

Apparently All-Japan Pro Wrestling Triple Crown champion **Toshiaki Kawada** isn't too impressed by **Bill Goldberg**. Prior to their scheduled match on May 8, Kawada was quoted as saying Goldberg was just "an obscure American" and would not be a major challenge. Kawada said Goldberg doesn't measure up to other Americans who have held the Triple Crown, such as **Vader** and **Stan Hansen**. For any fans who haven't had the pleasure of watching Kawada in action, he delivers some of the stiffest, most devastating moves in the world, and he is almost impossible to pin at times. He

(Continued on page 76)



"Hey, Styles! Wanna' hang out with me and Boo after school?"





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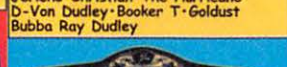
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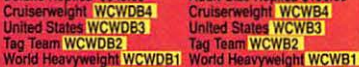
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# no holds barred

With Will Welsh

**W**HEN YOU SPEND so much time covering wrestling—as everyone who works for *THE WRESTLER* does—escaping the sport can be downright impossible. It doesn't matter if we're talking about Frank Krewda going to Viking Hall, the old ECW Arena, for a wedding reception; Dave Lenker, while on his way to Virginia, passing by all these little towns he recognizes from compiling *PWI's* "Arena Reports" section; or me, while enthralled in the pages of *Green Arrow* or *The Punisher*, having to skip past an advertisement for *Smackdown*.

No matter where we go or what we do, wrestling always finds a way to invade our lives.

A couple of months ago, my fiancée, Beth, and I set out to go shopping for our wedding bands. We're both from Pennsylvania, but because we're so close to Delaware (the home of tax-free shopping!), we hopped onto I-95 South and made the 20-minute drive to the country's first state. We knew of a couple of ring styles and designs that we wanted to look at, and we were already familiar with the jewelry store to which we were headed, so we were expecting an uneventful afternoon.

*Oops.*

When we got to the jewelry store and walked in, we were greeted by a salesman. He welcomed us in, but I didn't get a good look at him at first. It was only when he walked up to us and extended his hand that I realized with whom I was doing business.

"You ... you work for the ECWA! You're E.S. Easton! You manage Prince Nana!"

Easton's face turned flush red. He immediately withdrew his hand. "Who the heck?" he said under his breath. "Look at you, with your hat turned backward and those tattoos. This is a respectable establishment! You can't afford anything in here! I'm not going to stoop so low as to

help a fan out, anyway. Go on the Internet and look up cubic zirconia. You can afford that, can't you?"

The arrogance! And with my soon-to-be wife standing right next to me!

As calmly as I could, I said, "Yes, I'm a fan, but I'm also a writer."

Easton cringed, almost imperceptibly.

"My name is Will Welsh, and I write for *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, *THE WRESTLER*, and *Inside Wrestling*. That's where I know you from."

All the blood that had rushed to Easton's face suddenly disappeared as he went ashen white on us.

"I'm ... I'm sorry, Mr. Welsh. Oh ... gosh ... I'm so, so ... sorry," Easton stammered. "Who is this with you today? Your fiancée?"

Ah, Beth. If only you could have seen the expression on her face. It was one born of a mixture of revulsion and humor.

"Yes, I'm his fiancée," Beth said. "I don't know if you treat all your customers with so much ignorance, but Will bought my engagement ring here, and now we're



Just when a wrestling writer thinks he can get away from wrestling for half a day ... he runs into someone in the most unexpected of places. Will Welsh did more than bump into ECWA manager E.S. Easton while shopping for wedding bands.





That's E.S. Easton proudly posing with ECWA wrestlers Prince Nana and Mega. Are wrestlers/managers as nice/nasty away from the ring as they are when the spotlight is on? In the arrogant Easton's case, that's a tough question to answer.

getting our wedding bands. I'd think that the owners would like to retain our business, but if not, we can go elsewhere."

"No ... no, ma'am. I'm terribly sorry. This was a huge mistake on my part ..."

"Yes it was, Mr. Easton."

"Please, call me E.S. Come on in. I promise to take great care of you."

So Beth and I walked into the store, perhaps a little taken aback, but knowing that we had the upper hand. Fortunately, the rest of the sale went smoothly. Easton calmed down and treated us like he would any other customer—and I'd say probably even a little better. He got us a couple of drinks and dug up some snacks from the back. He even took the jewelry that Beth was wearing and had it cleaned free of charge. After we forked over more money than we could really afford and started to walk out the door, he stopped us.

"Will ... Beth"—we had moved past the formalities while shopping—"I'm sorry about the way things got started today. Please accept my apology. You were the first people to come in here and recognize me from wrestling, and I reacted poorly."

When we got into the car, Beth asked me, "So what's he *really* like? Which is the real him? The guy we met when we first walked through the door, or the guy who said goodbye to us as we were leaving?"

There was only one way to find out.

A couple of weeks later, I dragged Beth back down to Delaware—this time to St. Matthew's Parish Hall in Wilmington for an East Coast Wrestling Association card. I didn't tell Easton that we were coming, because I wanted him to act as he normally would. I didn't want our presence to influence him in the least. I wanted Beth to see him unawares.

Luckily for us, Prince Nana was scheduled to defend his Mid-Atlantic championship against Ace Darling in one of the night's main events, so Easton was really revved up. He yelled at the fans and distracted Darling and the referee numerous times. He also interfered on Nana's behalf.

"How does he get away with this?" Beth asked me. "He's acting exactly like he acted that day at the store, but he's

even worse! No wonder he treated us like that—look at how he treats the people here!"

Beth was right—the ugly E.S. Easton had returned. The fans booed him just as much as he berated them, and they cheered mightily when Darling defeated Nana to win the championship. As Easton and Nana walked out together, fans continued to heckle them until they were out of sight.

"You know, if he just acted *decent* here, maybe he'd get a few fans," Beth said to me as we left. "Maybe then, even if his wrestler lost his match, it would take some of the sting away from the loss. I bet hearing a few cheers after a loss would be nice for him, don't you?"

I wasn't so sure. "Maybe, but I think he enjoys being the bad guy. Just look at the other job he has: He has to butter people up all day long so he can sell them jewelry that they really don't need. That's tough, and maybe this is his outlet. Here, in this venue, he's allowed to act like an arrogant jerk. He gets to get all his negative energy out of his system.

"When he starts trying to sell jewelry to the ringside fans, that's when I'll know things have *really* started to go awry."



# blindsided

By Harry Burkett

**"T**HE NEXT BIG Thing" turned out to be the next big fizzle. At least that's what a vast majority of fans must have thought when they learned Brock Lesnar would be leaving WWE. Judging from the boos and catcalls Lesnar received inside Madison Square Garden at WrestleMania XX, when he lost to the also-departing Bill Goldberg, most fans had absolutely no



Criticize Brock Lesnar for walking out on WWE without much notice, but you ought to respect his decision to follow his heart, pursue his dream, and just get a breather. Like almost everyone else, Harry Burkett expects him back, but he doesn't want him to rush back.

respect for his decision to walk away from wrestling.

Sure, Lesnar had acted like a world-class jerk in recent feuds with Eddie Guerrero and Kurt Angle, but the youngster had also given WWE fans plenty of great memories in an amazingly short period of time. Couldn't the fans have given him a better sendoff? After all, Lesnar had exhibited a greater dedication to the business, doing more to improve his skills in three years than Goldberg had in seven.

Only 19 months earlier at SummerSlam 2002, held just a few miles away at the Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, New York, fans were cheering for the brutish Lesnar, who beat the hell out of The Rock, who was supposed to be the fan favorite, en route to capturing the undisputed WWE title. Why had the people turned against their champion? Because it was widely known that The Rock was ready to leave WWE again for his career in Hollywood.

It's ironic that Lesnar received the same treatment at WrestleMania XX. At that point, fans had read all kinds of rumors on the Internet, including a news item that stated Lesnar was leaving to pursue a career in the NFL. The latest scuttlebutt is that as many as 14 teams might be interested in him. While I have no idea if that is true, or whether Lesnar has serious ambitions regarding pro football, I find it hard to believe that he would throw away a lucrative wrestling career for such a pipe dream. When was the last time you heard of an NFL team signing a 26-year-old without collegiate football experience? Maybe that would have happened in the XFL, but not in the NFL. Even if Lesnar is dabbling with the idea, I'm sure he's smart enough not to bank his future on it.

So there must have been other reasons for his decision. Lesnar hated the grueling travel schedule. This has been the number-one factor in driving many wrestlers out of the business, including Nathan Jones last year. Lesnar began using a private plane, yet that fueled resentment against him. A former wrestling team captain at the University of Minnesota, Lesnar was already struggling in his attempts to become a leader in the Smackdown locker room. Many veteran stars viewed him as having too much of a know-it-all attitude, considering his limited experience.

Besides, Lesnar didn't possess a longstanding passion for pro wrestling. Before WWE agents recruited Lesnar for the developmental program in Ohio Valley, he shared the same condescending view as many of his mat colleagues: that "professional" wrestling was a joke that demeaned the amateur ranks. Later, Lesnar said his experience in OVW began to change his attitude and, by the time he became a major star in WWE, he had become an eager student of the business.



The bottom line is that Lesnar became a pro wrestler for the money. Now that Lesnar has made plenty of cash with WWE, it's only natural that he would want to take time off to enjoy it. Consider his life so far. Lesnar was an amateur wrestling standout at a very young age. From Lesnar's teenage years and through his early-20s, coaches and handlers honed his single-minded focus on amateur wrestling. When Lesnar became a pro wrestler, Vince McMahon, road agents, and trainers kept him focused on becoming the company's next top draw. Winning matches was the goal in amateur wrestling, while making money was the goal in pro wrestling.

Lesnar has met that goal. For the first time in his life, there are no coaches or promoters driving him toward the next wrestling meet or pay-per-view. This young man—in the prime of his life—has no commitments and the financial freedom to do whatever he wants. If you were in his position, would you trade that situation for cramped airplane seats and lonely hotel rooms? He has already reigned as WWE undisputed and Smackdown champion. Only three years into his career, the measure of Lesnar's success would be his ability to repeat what he has already done.

I commend Lesnar for seizing control of his life, doing what he can to enjoy the fruits of his hard work and treating wrestling as an occupation, not as something that defines his self-esteem. Of course, I expect Lesnar to make a return to wrestling at some point. He has undoubtedly become used to being a jetsetter and, assuming football doesn't work out for him, pro wrestling will be the easiest way for him to maintain that lifestyle and add to his bank account. What else is a man with those kinds of pecs and traps—not to mention that huge tattoo on his back—supposed to do for a living?

No one inside WWE is calling this a retirement. It's being called a departure, although there is no timetable for his return. I would call it a timeout, which is something that more wrestlers should get in the habit of taking. Timeouts allow wrestlers to rest nagging injuries, spend time with loved ones, and regain mental focus. No one should assume Lesnar is wasting valuable career time. Instead, it should be viewed as an investment toward a longer, healthier career—and the absence will freshen his character when he returns. For all of those reasons, I've always believed timeouts should be incorporated into every wrestler's annual schedule.

Quite a few wrestlers have taken regular timeouts over the years. In 1971, Bruno Sammartino was determined to



It was a bit strange that Lesnar took the brunt of the MSG crowd's fury at WrestleMania XX. Maybe he didn't have a strong passion for pro wrestling, but he sure worked hard to improve and did so at a much faster rate than Goldberg.

return to his quaint home in Pittsburgh after seven grueling years as WWF World champion. Vince McMahon Sr. had to do a lot of coaxing to get Sammartino to make a comeback as a full-time wrestler and defeat Stan Stasiak for his second title reign nearly three years later. Rick Steamboat kept his babyface image fresh—without ever turning heel—by taking lengthy sabbaticals, most notably to devote himself to his gym in the early-1980s.

We all remember when Shawn Michaels "lost his smile" and vacated the WWF World title at the height of his career in 1997. Many of these same wrestlers have taken off significant amounts of time because of injuries, but I assume these guys suffered from mental as well as physical burnout in several instances. Steve Austin has taken three controversial timeouts in recent years. He walked out of WWE for a few weeks on the day after WrestleMania X8, and then again two months later, this time staying away for eight months. In April 2004, Austin clocked out again—still trying to get his personal life in order and, according to rumors, possibly negotiate a dream showdown against Bill Goldberg in Japan.

I won't criticize Brock Lesnar for not having a passion for the business. During his short time in wrestling, he has shown pride in his craft, and that's good enough for me. Take all the time you want, Brock, and don't come back until you're ready. □

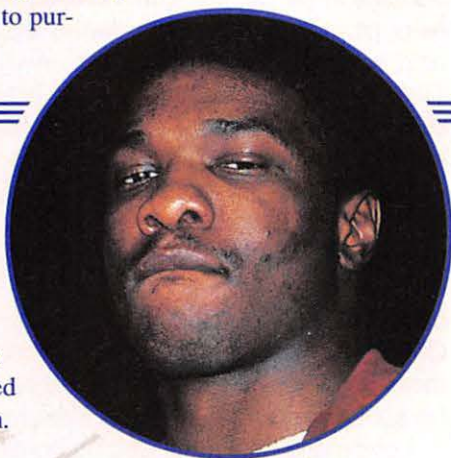


# thumbs up



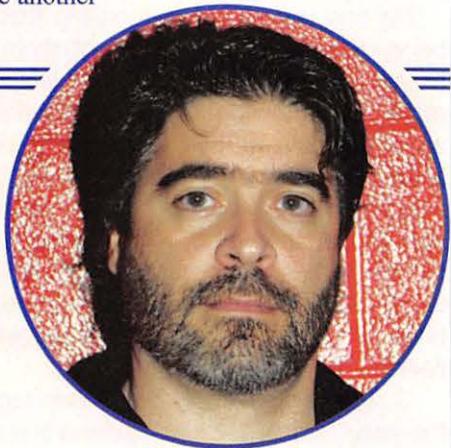
**Thumbs Up** to Brock Lesnar. This may not be an overly popular "Thumbs Up," but we're going to hand it out anyway. No matter what your initial reaction was to the news that Lesnar would be leaving WWE to try to make it in the NFL, you should see that he made the right decision for himself. Instead of going on cruise control in WWE and becoming a detriment to the promotion, Lesnar left when he was unhappy to pursue something he thinks he'll be happier doing—and (assuming he beats the odds and makes it) probably for significantly less money at that, too. Where was he wrong to pursue his dream?

**Thumbs Up** to Shelton Benjamin. As Benjamin, in his first week as a member of the Raw roster, prepared for his main event match with Triple-H (to be shown live on Raw on March 29), we thought he was acting just a little too cocky. After all, he was stepping into the ring with one of the most well-rounded and most dangerous wrestlers of this generation. Where was the trepidation? Where were the nerves? Apparently, there wasn't a need for any, because Benjamin knew that he was only minutes away from pulling off one of the biggest upsets in recent memory. He knew he could do it and willed himself to do it. He was confident for good reason.



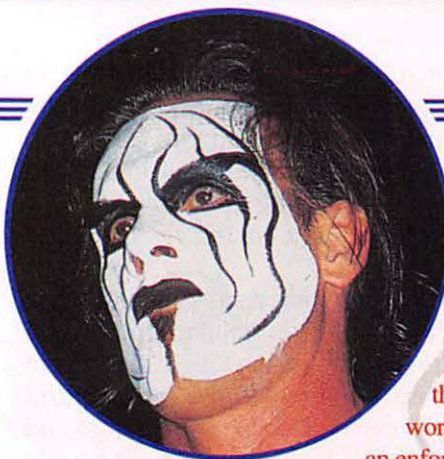
**Thumbs Up** to Nidia. When it was announced that Nidia was moving from Smackdown to Raw, we expected the diva to be disappointed. After all, she was leaving a brand in which she was expected to do very little in the ring (except look good and show off her body) and shifting to a brand in which she would be expected to wrestle a few times a week. Nidia, though, surprised us all when she embraced the opportunity to resume an in-ring career. She's actually excited to wrestle in the women's division and looked pretty good in upsetting Molly Holly in late-March! Not every WWE diva with such a cushy position on Smackdown would have been so thrilled. Is she another Trish Stratus in the making?

**Thumbs Up** to Vince Russo. Quickly, get out two pieces of cardboard and some cellophane. Put this magazine in between the two pieces of cardboard, and then wrap it up tightly with the cellophane because this here is a collector's item: Vince Russo gets a "Thumbs Up." We're still not sure if we completely believe in his change of heart, but we'll give Russo the benefit of the doubt (innocent until proven guilty, right?). Russo *hasn't* been overexposed and *has* been making positive changes since his return to NWA-TNA, and he seems genuinely interested in righting his wrongs. That, in case you don't know, is a good thing.

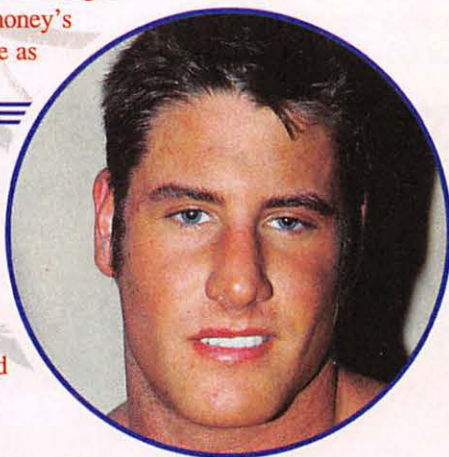




# thumbs down



**Thumbs Down** to Sting. Can you believe it? A “Thumbs Up” to Vince Russo and a “Thumbs Down” to Sting! This *is* a collector’s issue! We know that Sting’s heart is in the right place, but we’re just not so sure his head is. His semi-regular appearances on NWA-TNA pay-per-views are lackluster efforts at best, and it’s becoming obvious that his love for the sport just isn’t there in abundance anymore. If he wants to be a part of TNA, why doesn’t he go after Jeff Jarrett full-bore, or at least wrestle some of the younger stars who could use the rub from being in the ring with him? TNA can’t be getting its money’s worth by inviting him to just cut promos or serve as an enforcer referee.



**Thumbs Down** to Rene Dupree. When have no problem with most wrestlers who bring pets to the ring. We fondly recall The British Bulldogs and their English bulldog, Matilda. We even like to pop in old tapes of Koko B. Ware just to see that colorful parrot of his, Frankie. However, we have no need for Dupree’s poodle, Fifi. What an ugly pooch. Dupree needs to trade in Fifi for a dog that’s a bit more manly. Doesn’t he realize that Fifi makes him look like a pushover?

*Hmmmmmm ... if he gets a new dog, maybe he should hire an image consultant at the same time.*



**Thumbs Down** to Paul Heyman. What a quitter. We know that Heyman has no love for Raw General Manager Eric Bischoff, but when Bischoff pulled Heyman’s name during the draft lottery, the last thing we expected Heyman to do was quit. He usually has more resolve than that. He could have jumped to Raw and done his best to make Bischoff’s life miserable—which sounds like something Heyman would enjoy—but he didn’t even give himself that opportunity. He didn’t even think about staying for a second! As Heyman left Joe Louis Arena in Detroit that evening, he erased a lot of the respect we held for him.



**Thumbs Down** to Trish Stratus. How easy it was for us to forget that Stratus has a dark side. How easy it was for us to forget that she hasn’t always been the innocent, demure little proprietor of “Stratusfaction.” Her beautiful face framed by those long golden locks hypnotized us into thinking that she couldn’t hurt a fly without feeling a bit bad about it. How wrong we were, because when she turned against Chris Jericho to be with that creepy Christian, she didn’t just turn against Jericho—she also betrayed all of us who had put so much faith in her. It’s going to be hard for her to earn everyone’s trust back.



# correspondents reports

## **Newark, NJ: Northeast Wrestling Correspondent: Timothy A. Walker**

The main event of Northeast Wrestling's "Spring Slam" fundraising event to benefit the Scarlet Raiders Home Run Club was scheduled to pit *WWE Raw* color commentator Jerry "The King" Lawler against Al Snow in a singles match. *WWE Sunday Night Heat* play-by-play announcer Jonathan Coachman was also in the house, however, and he was determined to start trouble when he agreed to manage his *Heat* broadcasting partner for his match against "The King." Unfortunately for Coach, Lawler had a secret weapon—Mick Foley!



Mick Foley got a Socko claw on his long-time friend/nemesis Al Snow and Snow's pal Jonathan Coachman during a recent Northeast Wrestling show in New Jersey. Foley just couldn't stand by and watch Jerry Lawler deal with those two on his own.

Snow and Lawler traded holds back and forth in the beginning of the match, but after Coachman began interfering, Foley stormed the ring and demanded that the referee turn the bout into a tag team match with him and Lawler and facing Snow and Coach! The ref agreed, and the match was made right there on the spot.

Not surprisingly, the bout immediately turned into a slobberknocker, with all four men fighting both inside and outside the ring. When the action finally settled into something resembling a match, Snow took control against Lawler, bodyslamming him hard to the mat and stomping on his back. He then suplexed Lawler four consecutive times! Foley tried to tag his partner, but Lawler was just barely out of reach.

When Lawler was finally able to reach his corner and tag Foley, mayhem ensued. Eventually, the referee was knocked out of the ring and to the floor. Snow tried to take advantage of the situation by using a mandible claw on Foley, but Foley fought back with Mr. Socko and applied the mandible claw to both Snow and Coachman at the same time! When the referee finally re-entered the ring, Lawler caught Snow with a piledriver, and Foley covered him for the pin.

In other bouts: Short Sleeve Sampson pinned Little Killa in a midget match ... Jeff Starr pinned Jay Lethal ... Julio Dinero defeated Johnny Heartbreaker ... Dusty Rhodes pinned Simon Diamond ... Xavier beat The Amazing Red.

## **Nashville, TN: NWA Total Nonstop Action Correspondent: Jamie Pagan**

Since joining NWA-TNA, "Wildcat" Chris Harris has had great results teaming with James Storm as America's Most Wanted. Together, they've captured three NWA tag team championships, but neither man established a presence in the singles division until Harris got to challenge NWA champion Jeff Jarrett for the title. Harris took the fight to Jarrett early, going for numerous high-impact maneuvers in the match's first few minutes. He scored with a delayed vertical suplex, clotheslined the champ over the top rope to the floor, and then reversed Jarrett into a ringpost at about the four-minute mark.

Jarrett finally gathered enough momentum to



take control of the match, and he paid Harris back for the earlier punishment by ramming his head into the announcers' table and then clobbering him with a chair. Back in the ring, Jarrett tried to put the match away with a figure-four leglock, but Harris smartly reversed the painful hold. Jarrett did his best to keep the pressure on with a sleeper, but Harris suplexed Jarrett to escape and then followed with bulldog. However, instead of going for the pin, Harris went for a bodyblock. Jarrett ducked the maneuver and then gave Harris his finisher, the stroke!

But the referee couldn't make the count because he had been knocked out during the brawl. Kid Kash ran to the ring and woke the referee up, but the extra time Harris allowed him to kick out at two. Harris then took control of the match with a powerslam, but Kash began interfering on Jarrett's behalf, telling the referee that if he made the count on Jarrett, he'd be fired. The referee refused to make the three-count, allowing Jarrett to knock out Harris with the NWA championship belt. With his job on the line, the ref counted Harris' shoulders to the mat.

In other bouts: Jerry Lynn, Chris Sabin, Elix Skipper, & Sonjay Dutt beat Shark Boy, Jimmy Rave, Rod Strong, & Jason Cross ... Ron Killings beat Michael Shane ... Dustin Rhodes & El Leon beat The Redshirts ... A.J. Styles beat Abyss by disqualification ... The Insane Clown Posse beat Glenn Gilberti & Kid Kash ... Raven & Terry Funk beat Julio Dinero & C.M. Punk.

### **West Mifflin, PA: International Wrestling Cartel Correspondent: Tom Winston**

It was a wild night of wrestling at the CCAC South Campus Gymnasium. Bubba the Bulldog, Jimmy Vegas, and Dennis Gregory were scheduled to take on Shane Douglas and Chris Candido in an anything-goes streetfight, but "The Franchise" was injured and unable to wrestle. An overly confident Bubba bragged before the match that he was the one responsible for Douglas' injuries and that the former ECW champion would never be able to return to IWC.

Candido was left in an incredibly tough situation—having to face three opponents all by himself. Although the odds said he had little chance of winning, Candido showed his mettle by fighting off all his foes for several minutes. Bubba, Vegas, and Gregory were able to regroup soon enough, and they took advantage of the



An impossible three-on-one handicap match turned into a sweet victory for Chris Candido (shown pinning Bubba the Bulldog) in Pennsylvania thanks to New Jack of all people.

three-on-one situation as they administered a thorough beating to Candido. Every time it looked like Candido would be able to make a comeback, Bubba, Vegas, or Gregory would take advantage of the streetfight rules. At one point, Gregory bodyslammed Candido on the floor and Vegas put the boots to him outside the ring. Candido was in a lot of pain as he clutched his ribs with his right arm.

The action finally returned to the ring, and it looked like Bubba, Vegas, and Gregory were well on their way to a decisive win over the former WWF tag team champion when out of nowhere, New Jack ran down to the ring and sent bodies bouncing. Pennsylvania State Athletic Commission representative Chris Wood stormed into the ring and threatened to stop not only the match, but the entire card. While Wood argued with New Jack, Candido took advantage of the distraction and caught Bubba with a powerslam. The referee counted a stunned Bubba the Bulldog's shoulders down for a three-count, giving Candido and New Jack a stunning win.

In other bouts: Troy Lords beat Glenn Spectre ... Tracey Smothers & Chris Hamrick defeated Jimmy Jacobs & Fabulous ... Jake Garrett pinned Mickey Gambino ... Shirley Doe & Mahoney defeated Sebastian Dark & Soldier ... Tag team champions M-Dogg 20 & Josh Prohibition beat The Ring Crew Express ... Dean Radford pinned heavyweight champion Sterling James Keenan to win the championship ... **In the semifinals of a mini-tournament to determine the number-one seed in the Super Indy Tournament:** A.J. Styles defeated C.M. Punk ... Colt Cabana beat Super Hentai ... **Finals:** Styles pinned Cabana. □



## WWE SHOULD HOLD A LOTTERY EVERY YEAR

By Frank Krewda

**W**HO IS SHELTON Benjamin? To *Raw* viewers, he's the man who, along with Triple-H, put on one of the most thrilling TV main events in recent years on March 29. It was a simple premise: Benjamin, the young, still relatively unknown upstart vs. Triple-H, the dominant former champion. Against all odds, the novice surprises the master to score a clean pinfall.

However, had Vince McMahon not ordered a compulsory draft lottery on March 22, Benjamin still would have been wrestling on the Smackdown roster in less significant tag team matches. But having been given the chance to make a name for himself on his own with a fresh start, Benjamin has taken full advantage. Now WWE has a fresh face poised to enter its top tier.

Creating new superstars—that's only one reason the WWE should hold a *Raw*/Smackdown lottery draft once a year. As some of the stale storylines and stagnant characters of the past two years have shown, the rosters need to be shaken up every now and then if for no other reason than the sake of change and creation of fresh matchups and rivalries.

Ask yourself this question: Why hasn't *Raw* delivered more main event matches as compelling as Benjamin vs. Triple-H in the last two years? Could be because the major players are all too familiar. We've seen the same faces and a lot of the same matches week after week, month after month. But with the influx of new wrestlers, Vince has wiped the canvas clean, and if the Benjamin-Triple-H bout was any indication,



Mark Jindrak hopes that, like Shelton Benjamin, the 2004 draft lottery will be a major turning point in his career and that he'll get a chance to become Smackdown's breakout star of 2004. Frank Krewda argues that an annual lottery would make it easier for WWE to create new main eventers.

WWE and professional wrestling will be much the better for it.

There are other benefits, too. More young wrestlers will be given a chance to shine in new and possibly invigorating roles. When you switch brands, you get to start anew. That should lead to more inspired performances. Even the draft itself, the actual event, will give WWE something new to build around. Sure, the March 22 episode of *Raw* featured little wrestling, but the drama that surrounded the draft kept viewers on the edges of their seats.

Let's face it: The glass ceiling that encased Triple-H, Steve Austin,

Kane, and Ric Flair on *Raw* needed to be smashed. Now that Shelton Benjamin has crashed through it, more talent—such as Tajiri, Nidia, and Rhyno on the *Raw* side, and perhaps Rob Van Dam, Rene Dupree, and Mark Jindrak on the Smackdown side—will raise their games and join him.

Of course, some people are reluctant to leave their comfort zones and embrace change. Then again, given the state of WWE programming over the past few years, some, like me, will tell you that change is good.

**Frank Krewda is a senior writer for THE WRESTLER.**



# counterpoint:

## FREQUENT ROSTER SHUFFLING DESTROYS CONTINUITY

By Liz Hunter

**S**O VINCE McMAHON interrupts a live *Raw* broadcast to announce that Smackdown and Raw will be swapping wrestlers yet again, and the fans are supposed to respond excitedly like Pavlov's dogs? Didn't this experiment fail when the brand extension first occurred? Didn't the fans sense the almost total absence of logic back then?

While a draft would certainly be an effective way to shake things up from time to time, tinkering with the lineups on an annual basis would ruin the continuity of both brands and could ultimately alienate a lot of fans. And I feel it's a risk that's not worth taking.

Popular superstars like Rob Van Dam and The Dudley Boyz amass a following of fans based in part on their association with their show/brand. Same goes for Kurt Angle and Eddie Guerrero. Mess with the roster and you mess with the formula for success. Each wrestler's unique contribution to a brand is an integral part of the show, and makes each program what it is. Each wrestler gives his or her respective brand a little personality. That's what attracts viewers.

I'm a firm believer that the brand extension is lost on the average wrestling fan, who enjoys the total WWE product, not one brand over another. Swapping talent won't encourage some kind of intrapromotion-



Booker T didn't appreciate getting traded to the "minor leagues" just so Raw could reacquire the services of Triple-H, who was drafted by Smackdown. But Liz Hunter isn't quite sold on the notion that an annual lottery will heat up a rivalry between the two brands.

al war. And since both brands fall under Vince McMahon's banner, no sense of competition can be derived from this shortsighted and impulsive mandate.

Nor do I believe the superstars themselves will necessarily embrace such an abrupt shift in the direction of their careers. Booker T made his feel-

ings clear on a recent episode of *Smackdown*. He clearly sees the show as the "minor leagues," and who can blame him? He made his name in WWE on the Raw side. There's nothing invigorating about what he considers a demotion, and I can't see "Smackdown fans" getting irate just because someone has insulted their brand.

Even more troubling is the idea that WWE would build around the draft each year, so that just when WWE fans and performers are getting comfortable with the new storylines and superstars, here come the ping-pong balls to jar everybody's sensibilities. Why, because it's the right thing to do, or because it's just time for that yearly change? Before long, both brands could be nothing more than a collection of names thrown together, void of logic and cohesion, and the fans will pick up on it.

The entire notion of an annual draft smacks of that fatal flaw: hot-shotting. The draft might be good for a

nice ratings boost on one night in March, and it might cause some chatter among fans, but in the end, fans will see it as another shameless ploy on Vince's part to sell more tickets and merchandise for both Raw and Smackdown.

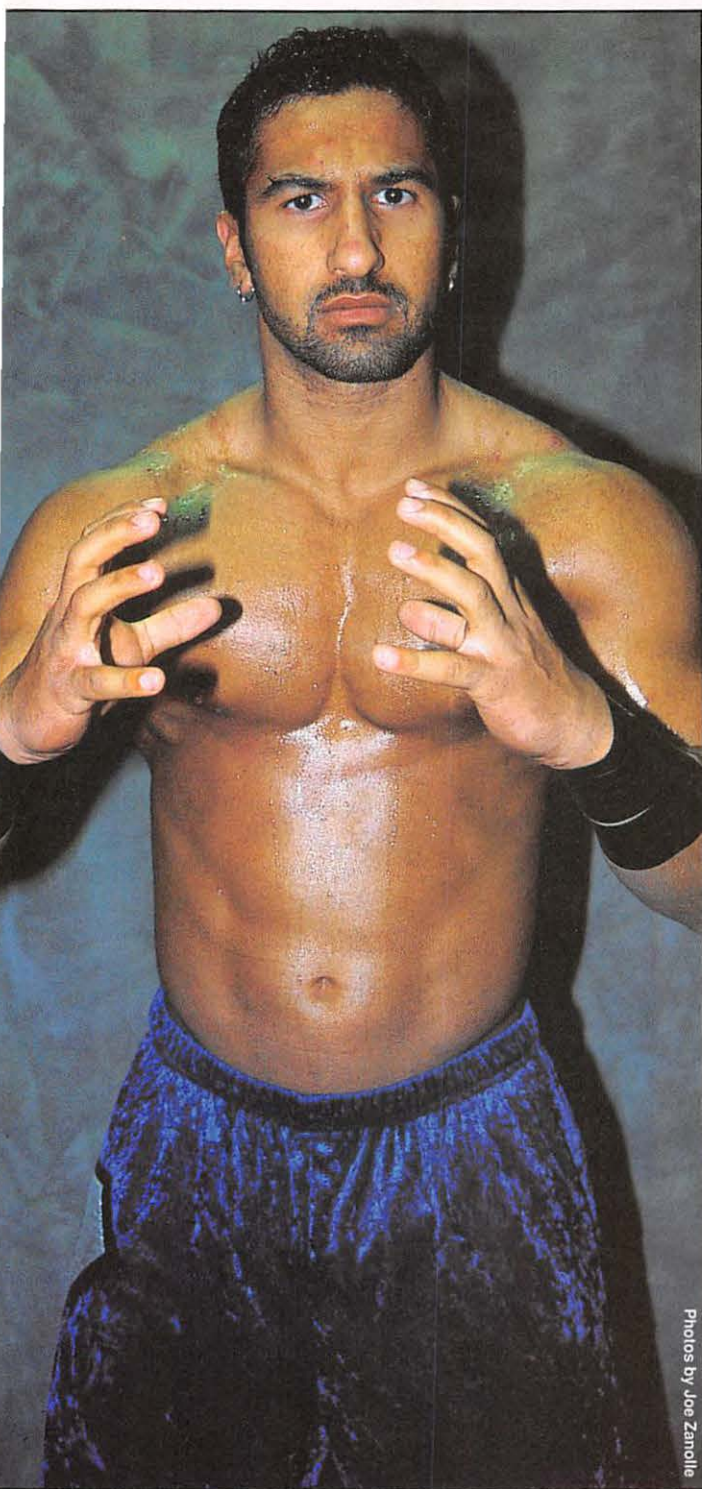
**Liz Hunter is a contributing writer for THE WRESTLER.**



# introducing:

By Harry Burkett

## SHAWN DAIVARI



Photos by Joe Zanolle

**Despite some anti-Middle Eastern sentiments in the U.S. after 9/11, Shawn Daivari hasn't downplayed his ethnicity. Instead, Daivari proudly displays his heritage in the ring. His popularity is growing, too**

**H**IS HOMETOWN IS listed as Tehran, Iran, but Shawn Daivari is nothing like The Iron Sheik. No, there are no swinging clubs or loaded curly-toed boots for this rising star. If anything, he might have a touch of Sabu in him. At least that's an often-heard comparison, whether Daivari is appearing in the Midwest, in the South, or on the East Coast. Daivari is transcending the stereotype of the Middle Eastern wrestler in the post-9/11 era.

"I'm not on a mission or anything like that, but I didn't want to do the same Middle Eastern character that fans are used to seeing," explained Daivari. "When I'm in the ring, I'm basically just me, Shawn Daivari (pronounced DA-VARI). Yes, I'm a full-blooded Iranian and a Muslim. I just add a little Middle Eastern flair to reflect my heritage. It's part of who I am."

His parents left Iran and arrived in the United States in the early-1980s. Shawn was born shortly thereafter. He grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and became an avid wrestling fan, admiring technical wrestlers, especially Bret Hart. "I liked him because of his personality and his style in the ring," recalled Daivari. "Arn Anderson and Kurt Angle are two of my other favorites."

Daivari was such a wrestling fanatic that he began training under Eddie Sharkey at the tender age of 15. He refereed several matches before finally making his debut in the year 2000, a three-on-one affair pitting him, Ricker, and female wrestler Lacy against then-WCW cruiserweight champion Lenny Lane at a local independent show. Daivari scored the pinfall over Lane.

He pursued his fledgling career—most often against rivals such as Austin Aries and "Kamikaze Kid" Ken Anderson—while continuing his high school studies. It wasn't un-



usual for Daivari to wrestle in Milwaukee on Saturday night, in Chicago on Sunday night, and then make a six-hour drive back home to Minneapolis. That left only about two hours for Daivari to sleep before rising at 6 a.m. to get to school that Monday. "I fell asleep pretty often during my first class of the day," Daivari remembers. "It wasn't strange for me to have a black eye or a busted nose, either. In fact, my guidance counselor asked if my dad was beating me."

For someone who is only 19 years of age, Daivari has had the good fortune of being invited to wrestle in several dark matches for WWE. His opponents have included Ultimo Dragon, Tommy Dreamer, and Steven Richards. On one occasion, Daivari teamed with Aries in a losing effort against The Dudley Boyz. After Daivari wrestled Aries in one dark match, Stephanie Mc-

Mahon congratulated both of them, a rare gesture by WWE's creative head. According to Daivari, "She complimented us for not going high-spot crazy and, despite the fact that having two indy wrestlers against each other often made the agents nervous, she said we had a good match."

Daivari's most recent high-profile appearance occurred at this year's Super 8 Tournament at St. Matthew's Parish Center in Wilmington, Delaware. ECWA promoter Jim Kettner had already invited Daivari to participate in a tag team summit, a Rumble-style match held during the same show. Six days before the event, however, Kettner had to replace Tyson Dux, who suffered an injury, and he invited Daivari to take his place in the tournament. Daivari's first-round opponent turned out to be ... Austin Aries. Although Daivari fell prey to Aries' 450 splash, he was grateful for the chance to entertain the crowd against an opponent he had wrestled countless times.

While the fans appreciated Daivari's array of backbreakers and suplexes, he got the loudest reaction when he



It was quite the honor for Shawn Daivari to be asked to participate in the ECWA Super 8 Tournament this year, and perhaps fitting that he ran into Austin Aries—a frequent opponent in the Midwest—in the first round. He turned in a good performance in defeat. Daivari already has WWE experience and will be getting a shot in TNA and ROH soon.

attempted his finisher, a splash from the top rope. Sounds like a simple enough move, right? But when Daivari grabbed his Middle Eastern rug from ringside, this simple maneuver transformed into a showstopper.

Daivari is amazed that such a basic prop has given life to one of the most popular finishing moves on the indy circuit. "I got the idea from the movie *Aladdin*," he said. "There's a scene where his magic carpet flies into the air, and Aladdin has to hold on for dear life as the carpet pulls him along. Well, my parents had a Middle Eastern carpet, so I pulled it out from under the ring one night just to pop my partner. But the whole place went crazy, and I've been using the magic carpet ride ever since."

More fans will soon get a chance to see the magic carpet ride, too. Daivari has moved from Minneapolis to Louisville, Kentucky, which will be his home base as he makes appearances for NWA-TNA in Nashville. At press time, he was set to debut in Ring of Honor as well.

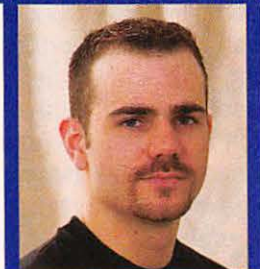
Daivari is poised to take fans on quite a ride ... a magic carpet ride, that is. □



# from bell to bell

By Mike Quackenbush

*[Editor's note: Mike Quackenbush, who has held numerous titles in the United States and beyond, files reports on the life of an independent wrestler seeking to make an impact on the business. In this issue, he discusses the nervousness he felt when he was but a rookie more than a decade ago and compares it to the feelings he experiences as he watches those up-and-comers he has trained step through the curtain to perform.]*



**W**HEN I HAD my first real independent match a number of years back, the ride to that crummy barn in West Virginia felt like it lasted an eternity. I alternated between wild perspiration and cold sweat for hours. I was anxious, tense, nauseous, and hyper. I checked

my bag about a dozen times ... singlet ... socks ... towel ... tape. Every time I zipped it shut, I convinced myself there was something else I had forgotten. Once I found a seat in the locker room, I remained a bundle of nerves until it was time to let the fans into the building.

Then, as I heard them filing in, talking amongst themselves, buying T-shirts, eating popcorn, and ultimately taking their seats, I started to shake in my shoes. When the penultimate moment arrived, waiting behind the curtain for the signal to make my entrance, that was as close to a near-death experience as I've ever had. Call it performance anxiety, stage fright, whatever—the butterflies in my stomach that day were made of lead and had razor wings. I can only imagine what an impression I would have made had I sprinted down the aisle and then puked out my guts.

I didn't make a very good impression that evening, even though I managed to keep my lunch down. A 400-pound hillbilly had a literal squash match with me that lasted all of about five minutes.

In the years that followed, I still found myself getting nervous before my matches, but not in the extreme fashion I had on that first night. Some nights in particular proved more stressful than others: high-profile matches, championship bouts, or show-downs with wrestling heroes of mine. Like a lot of other wrestlers, once I cross through the entrance-



Imagine the nerves Mike Quackenbush must have felt when he took to the air early in his career (above left). Imagine the nerves any young wrestler must feel when he executes even basic moves early in his career. As he got more experience and collected his share of titles (above right), that nervousness disappeared. Now it's back in a different form.

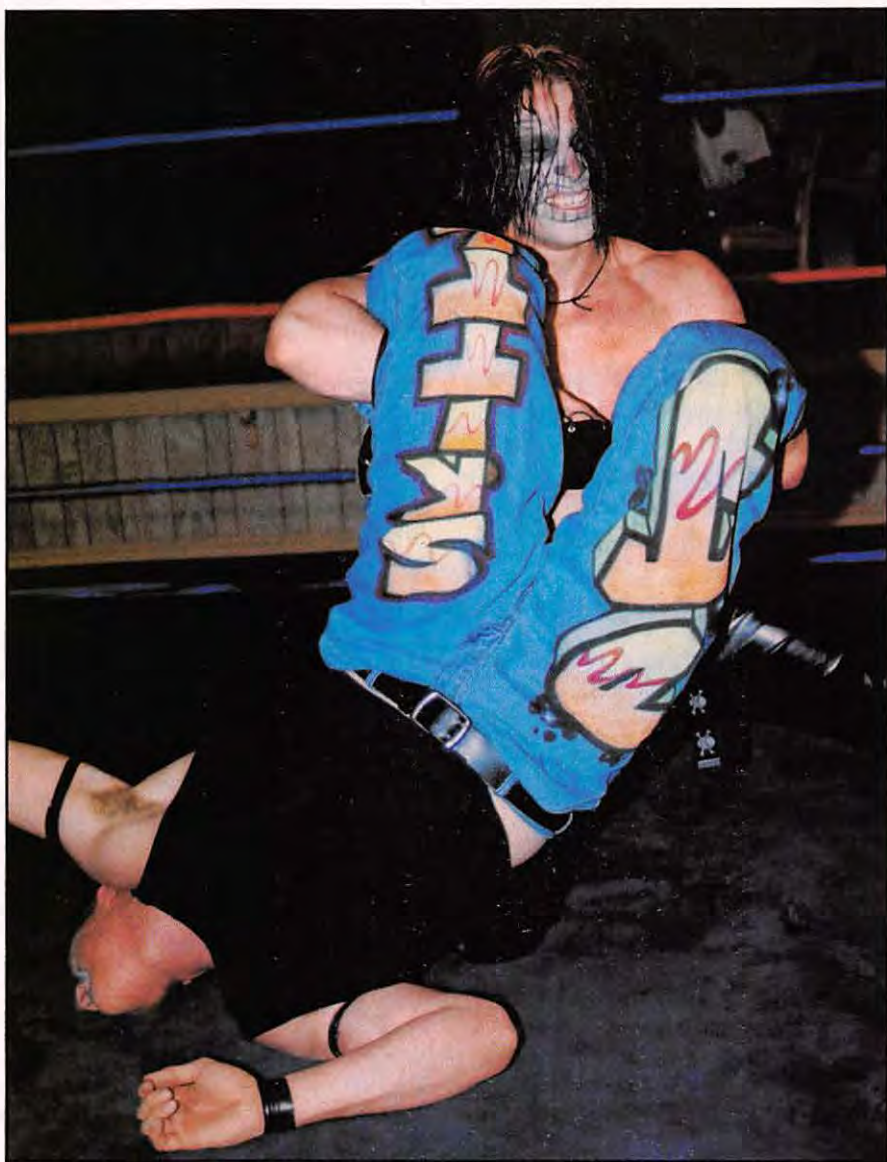


way and see that the ring is just a few strides down the aisle, all the anxiety fades, and I feel charged up and ready to perform. Since my rookie year, a lot has changed, from the way I wrestle to the way I pack my bag for road trips. I have the benefit of experience on my side now, as well as all the things I've learned from my own mentors in the wrestling business.

Watching some of my oldest matches is an exercise in embarrassment now because I can see in my body language that I was anything but a pro wrestler in those earliest stages. I was so riddled with nervousness that I could barely keep from tripping over my own two feet.

A little more than two years ago, I opened a wrestling school in Allentown, Pennsylvania, with my sometimes-partner/sometimes-rival Reckless Youth. Eventually, our CHIKARA Wrestle Factory would beget the promotion CHIKARA, but in the very beginning, we didn't have the time to devote to a promotional venture. We had a class of students that needed our attention, some of them having never set foot in a ring before arriving at our training center. Taking all the experiences we'd had from years of traveling and wrestling and then conveying them to our students ate up a lot of time in our weekly schedules. Reckless left the company in late-2002, and the demand it puts on my schedule has only increased since then.

These days I take a great deal of pride in seeing the improvements my students make from the day they start training to the day that they have their first match. From there, it is a rewarding experience to be able to sit back and watch as they evolve as wrestlers, learning the nuances of performing that only ring time can teach. Since the Wrestle Factory opened, I've had the chance to travel to other parts of the world and wrestle in Mexico and Europe. Dealing with officials, wrestlers, and management personnel in a foreign language is one of the most nerve-racking experiences I have ever known, but it's just part of the world that is my life in wrestling now. It's not the same type of anxiety I



Quackenbush may not have been directly involved in this CHIKARA match pitting Blind Rage against D.J. Skittlez, but you can be sure he was nervous about it before it started ... and all the way through until it ended.

used to feel as an undersized, inexperienced wrestler all those years ago as I waited in the locker room for my match to be called. In fact, when I'm home in the United States, it's almost an odd occurrence when I find myself getting nervous before one of my matches. I've all but outgrown that part of my wrestling ritual.

However, I found that while my own matches aren't cause for much distress these days, something has taken their place. Now, the nervousness I used to feel as a rookie, sitting backstage obsessing over my impending performance, I feel for my students, each and every time they hit the ring to wrestle. Like an overprotective

parent, you'll find me crouching behind the curtain, peeking out to keep an eye on my proteges with the same nervous tension I used to reserve for my own prematch afternoons. I imagine it's what an apprehensive father feels while watching his son at his first music recital, proud of him for arriving at this moment to showcase his talent, and yet simultaneously and equally nervous for him.

The most stressful part of a wrestling card is no longer the minutes leading up to my match—not for me anyway. Watching furtively as my trainees make the same rookie mistakes I made at their age provides all the anxiety I can handle in one evening. □



# Spotlight On...

## JERRY LYNN

**F**ORMER ECW WORLD heavyweight champion Jerry Lynn is one of the most well-traveled and respected talents on the independent circuit ... Born on June 12, 1963, in the pro wrestling hotbed of Min-

neapolis, Minnesota ... Trained under former Olympian Brad Rheingans and made his pro debut in 1988 ... Got his first taste of championship gold by beating Johnny Love for the Pro Wrestling America light heavyweight

title in Red Wing, Minnesota, on January 24, 1990 ... Captured the PWA heavyweight title from former AWA standout Ricky Rice on August 12, 1990 ... With his strong technical skills and fluid chain wrestling, Lynn caught the eye of promoters in the Memphis-based USWA and was invited to work in that territory in the fall of 1990.

Lynn also continued to work in the Minnesota area, where he got involved in his biggest feud to date with a fellow light heavyweight then known as The Lightning Kid (Sean "X-Pac" Waltman) ... Defeated Kid to regain the PWA light heavyweight title on January 14, 1991 ... Kid and Lynn continued their feud in the Texas-based Global Wrestling Federation, where both men competed in a tournament to crown a new light heavyweight champion ... This was Lynn (and Waltman's) first national exposure, as GWF shows aired on ESPN ... Lynn and Waltman traded wins on a regular basis, and their matches were filled with innovative moves and counter-moves ... Some would say it was a precursor to the series Lynn had with Rob Van Dam years later ... Lynn defeated Waltman for the GWF junior heavyweight and PWA light heavyweight titles on December 27, 1991 ... In early-1992, Waltman and Lynn toured Japan as a tag team, competing for the revolutionary UWF promotion ... Team was so successful that they brought it to the U.S. ... On March 2, 1993, Lynn and Waltman captured the PWA tag team title with a win over Tony DeNucci and Tommy Ferrara.

Seeking to expand his horizons, Lynn signed with Japan's Michinoku Pro Wrestling in the summer of 1995 and competed under a mask as Sultan Gorgola ... Later that year, he tried out for the WWF, but the WWF wasn't



December 1991: Jerry Lynn and The Lightning Kid (Sean Waltman) had classic matches in their native Minnesota, in Texas, and even in Japan. They made a terrific team, but they made even better rivals.









October 1995: Big surprise—the masked Mr. J.L. character never took off in WCW. It wasn't exactly a clever persona. Lynn dropped his only WCW pay-per-view match to Sabu at Halloween Havoc 1995.

interested ... Lynn's initials helped him land a gig with WCW ... The promotion announced that a masked high-flyer with the initials J.L. would be coming soon, fueling speculation that former light heavyweight champion Jushin Liger would return ... Instead, Lynn debuted under a mask as Mr. J.L. ... Despite Lynn's outstanding skills, fans never really embraced Mr. J.L., feeling that WCW pulled a bait-and-switch with them ... Wrestled his one and only WCW PPV match on October 29, 1995, losing to Sabu in less than four minutes at Halloween Havoc ... Lynn competed against some of the top cruiserweights in the world, including Dean Malenko, Eddie Guerrero, and Chris Benoit, but never captured the cruiserweight title ... Was fired by Eric Bischoff in a cost-cutting move ... Lynn received another WWF tryout in 1997, facing Taka Michinoku and

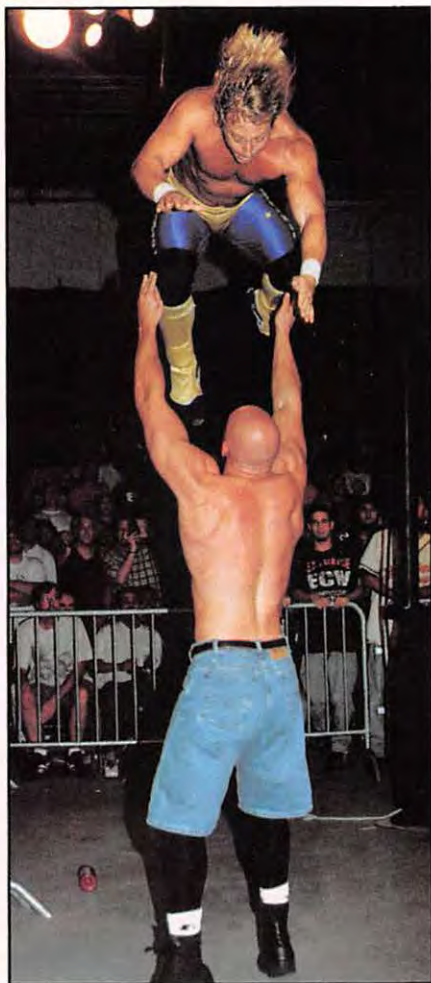


February 1992: That's a young, fresh-faced Jerry Lynn posing in Japan with the GWF junior heavyweight belt he won from The Lightning Kid.

Louie Spicolli in dark matches, but was not offered a contract.

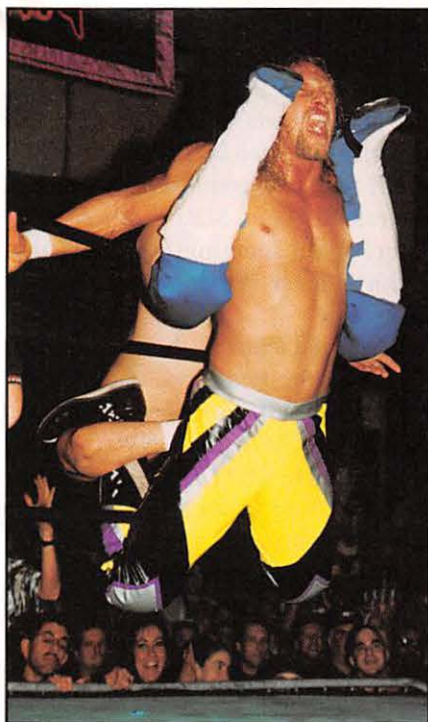
Just when it looked like no one of note was interested in him, Lynn was offered matches with ECW ... Made his ECW debut on September 5, 1997, against Chris Candido in

Waltham, Massachusetts ... Briefly teamed with former Fantastic Tommy Rogers ... Scored his first ECW PPV win at 1998's Living Dangerously, teaming with Chris Chetti to beat Full-Blooded Italians Little Guido (Nunzio) and Tracey Smothers ... Lost to Justin Credible in the opening match of Heatwave 1998 ... Was robbed at 1998's November to Remember, losing to Lance Storm in a match officiated by both Tammy Sytch and Mikey Whipwreck ... Began to develop a cult following and a reputation as one of the most innovative wrestlers in the sport ... On March 21, 1999, Lynn challenged Rob Van Dam for the ECW TV title ... What resulted was one of ECW's greatest matches ever, a back-and-forth contest in which the underrated Lynn on several occasions came astoundingly close to pinning the promotion's franchise player ... Van Dam



September 1997: Lynn goes high into the air to knock down Justin Credible outside the ring at the ECW Arena in Philadelphia. Almost exactly three years later, he would beat Credible to win the ECW World title.





April 1999: The searing pain of Tajiri's tarantula! Lynn got caught in that hold a few times during his ECW career. He and "The Japanese Buzzsaw" had some exciting bouts.



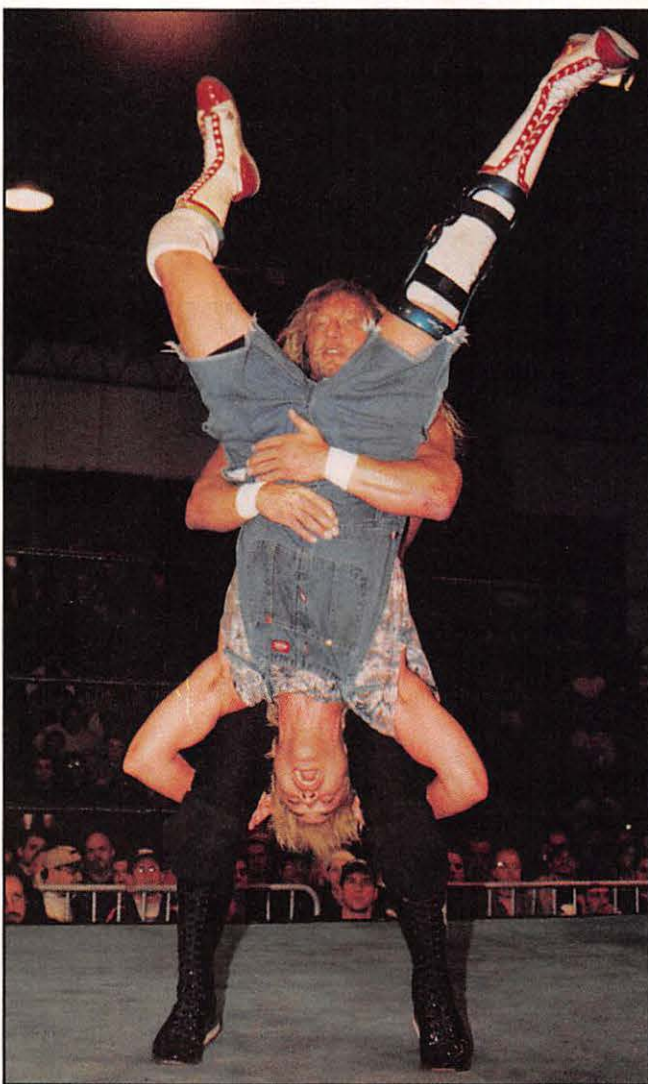
August 1998: Lynn and Rob Van Dam treated us to so many wonderful matches in ECW in the late-1990s, and they didn't need to crash through tables to keep everyone's interest.

barely escaped with the TV title at Hardcore Heaven in a match that was voted first runner-up in the Match of the Year category of the 1999 *PWI* Achievement Awards ... Beneath their professional rivalry was a deep respect, which was evident when Lynn and Van Dam teamed to beat Lance Storm and Justin Credible in the main event of Heatwave 1999.

Lynn defeated Yoshihiro Tajiri and Super Crazy in a wild three-way dance at November to Remember 1999 in Buffalo ... Was voted Most Improved Wrestler of 1999 by the readers of *PWI* ... "The respect and support of the fans mean more to me than any belt ever could," Lynn said ... But if it wasn't for bad luck, Lynn would have no luck at all. He finally pinned arch-rival Van Dam at Hardcore Heaven on May 14, 2000, but RVD had previously been stripped of the TV title due to injury ... Teamed with Tommy Dreamer in

a one-night tourney to crown new tag champs. They made it to the finals before losing to Tajiri and Whipwreck ... On October 1, 2000, Lynn finally captured the ECW World title, defeating Credible in the main event of Anarchy Rulz in St. Paul, Minnesota ... Fans embraced Lynn as the promotion's rightful champ.

Unfortunately, Lynn's reign would be short-lived, as he lost the title one month later in a "Double Jeopardy" match also involving Credible, Steve Corino, and The Sandman ... Corino emerged from the mess with the gold ... Shortly before the demise of ECW in early-2001, Lynn met with WWF Vice President of Talent Relations Jim Ross to discuss a contract ... The third time was, indeed, the charm, and Lynn received a WWF deal ... Made his first appearance in a dark match on March



December 2000: The cradle piledriver has long been Lynn's finisher of choice. Here he puts away little Spike Dudley with one.





June 2001: Lynn takes Crash Holly's best punch during a defense of his WWF light heavyweight title. Although he won that championship in his first televised match, Lynn was never given much of an opportunity to shine in McMahonland.

25, 2001, beating Essa Rios ... Made his TV debut in grand style, beating Crash Holly to win the WWF light heavyweight title live on *Sunday Night Heat* on April 29, just prior to the start of Backlash ... Lynn relinquished the title to Jeff Hardy on June 5, 2001 ... Suffered a torn patella tendon and

underwent knee surgery in August ... He was cut from the WWF roster as he recovered.

Lynn made a surprise appearance at the February 24, 2002, World Wrestling All-Stars PPV in Las Vegas, attacking and cutting a promo on Eddie Guerrero ... Guerrero returned to WWE before the match could take place, forcing Lynn to wrestle A.J. Styles at WWA's next PPV ... Styles scored the upset win ... Lynn signed with NWA-TNA and became an immediate player in that promotion's exciting X division ... Styles became the first X division champion by beating

Lynn, Low-Ki, and Psicosis in a four-way match ... Showing there weren't *too many* hard feelings, Lynn teamed with Styles to win the NWA tag title in a tournament final over The Rainbow Express on July 3, 2002 ... Alas, the team quickly imploded and the title had to be vacated ... Lynn won the X title

on August 21 in a three-way ladder match also involving Styles and Low-Ki, but he was forced to vacate that title due to injury on October 9, 2002 ... His experience helped him defeat Styles for the X title on November 6 ... Dropped the title to Sonny Siaki just one month later, again seemingly proving that Lynn is a far better contender than champion.

Lynn and fellow X division standout The Amazing Red formed an effective team and beat Christopher Daniels and Elix Skipper to win the NWA tag title on April 16, 2003, only to drop the belts just three weeks later to Daniels in a handicap match ... On May 21, 2003, Lynn captured the WWA cruiserweight title in a tournament in Sydney, Australia ... Left TNA and continued to compete in various independent promotions, including IWA Mid-South, where he won the heavyweight title ... Made peace with TNA management in early-2004 and returned to action ... He was named captain of Team NWA (which also includes Elix Skipper and Sonjay Dutt) for the Americas X Cup tournament ... He remains arguably the most consistent and technically sound wrestler in TNA today. □



February 2002: Lynn made a surprise appearance at the World Wrestling All-Stars' Revolution pay-per-view, cutting short Eddie Guerrero's victory celebration by attacking him and then berating him.



October 2003: The other stars of NWA-TNA's X division, including Michael Shane, may be younger than Lynn, but he has been able to keep up with them quite nicely, thank you.



# A Salute To THE LEGENDS

**Dale Earnhardt. George Harrison. Elvis Presley.  
Bob Hope. Johnny Cash.**

These men gave so much of themselves to the world, and their passing left a huge void for us all. Their deaths are to be mourned, but their lives are to be celebrated.

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**Bob Hope—Thanks For The Memories:** He brought America to the troops and joy to America.

**Johnny Cash—The Man In Black:** His influence on his fans and fellow musicians cannot be understated.



# Q&A

When this "Dragon" roared, fire came spewing out of his mouth, although that was helped by kerosene. Steamboat didn't particularly care for the costume he had to wear to play the part in the WWF.





# RICK STEAMBOAT

**N**EARLY THREE DECADES since his debut, Rick Steamboat stands out as one of the most respected superstars in the business. In addition to appearing in NWA-TNA during the early months of that promotion, the Hall of Famer has made numerous appearances on the independent circuit, signing autographs, conducting wrestling camps, and serving as special referee. Often hailed for his professionalism inside and outside of the ring, Steamboat has become a role model for a new generation of emerging talent.

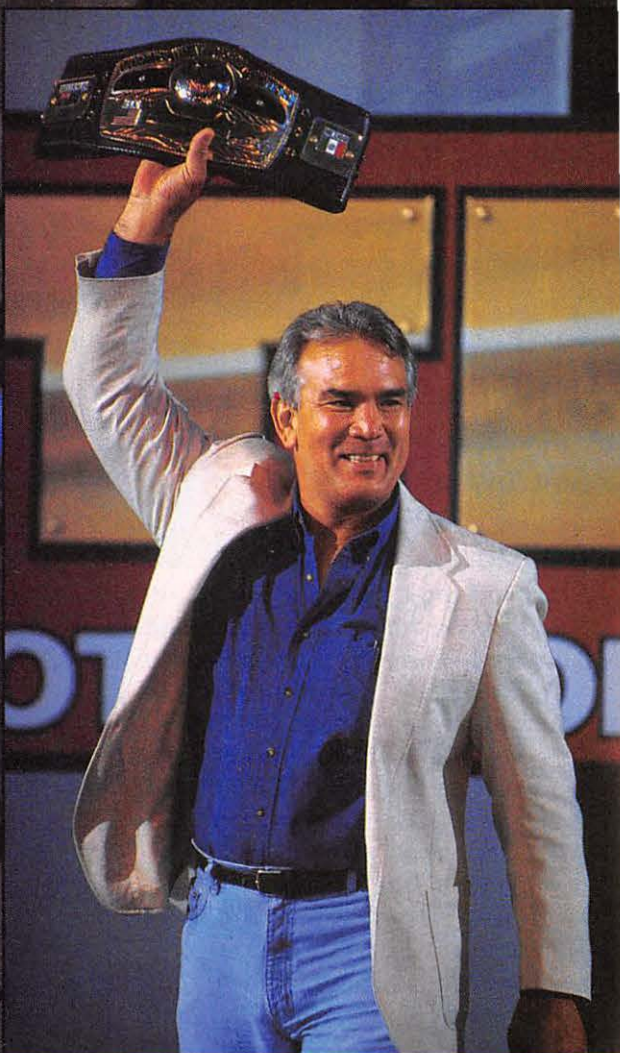
Why is Steamboat such a revered figure in the industry? As Steamboat acknowledges in the following interview, he was the "common denominator" throughout 20 years of wrestling history. Some experts would argue that his rivalry with Ric Flair was the greatest in wrestling history. Steamboat and partner Jay Youngblood (who died in 1985) set the standard for tag team matches with their historic steel cage showdown with Sgt. Slaughter and Don Kernodle in 1983. Furthermore, Steamboat's Intercontinental title win over Randy Savage in 1987 has been touted as the greatest WrestleMania match of all-time by this publication and others.

Steamboat is known as the "common denominator" because he has been able to spur so many other wrestlers on to higher standards of excellence. Inside the business, it was commonly known that it was hard not to have a great match with "The Dragon."

While Steamboat excelled at making his partners and opponents look good, he enjoyed his own share of success in the spotlight. His capture of the NWA World heavyweight title from Flair in 1989—after a 12-year rivalry—is regarded as the apex of his career. But even in the twilight of his career, Steamboat had an exciting series of matches with the up-and-coming Steve Austin. It was during a match against Austin in the fall of 1994 that Steamboat suffered a career-ending spinal injury.

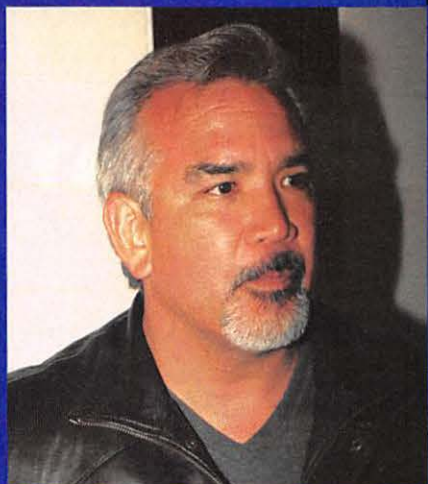
Ten years after his retirement, Steamboat remains a student of the game. He still follows the wrestling scene and particularly enjoys teaching younger wrestlers the fine points of ring psychology. Steamboat discusses the art of wrestling—as well as his illustrious career—with Senior Writer Harry Burkett in this exclusive 60-minute "Q & A."

"Steamboat is unlike many retired wrestlers I have met," noted Burkett. "He isn't bitter toward the wrestling business at all. Although he does have some criticisms of today's wrestling, it is in the form of constructive advice. He is definitely the conscience of wrestling. Given his age and the condition of his spine, Steamboat could never make a full comeback ... but I still wouldn't rule out a few limited engagements. Ric Flair had better watch out, because 'The Dragon' might have some fire left in him."



**"People will come into my shop and ask for service work, look at the pictures, and then look at me again. They'll say, 'You're not Ricky Steamboat, are you? I always watched you as a kid and you were always my favorite!' Then we'll talk about that for 15 minutes, and I'll say, 'Okay, so what's wrong with your boat?'"**





**"It was a good contrast right from the beginning. I had longer black hair at the time, and Flair had long blond hair. I was a mild babyface, and he was a ruthless egomaniac. That was a good mix."**

**Q: First off, I'd like for you to address a rumor that was going around recently. The rumor was that WWE was interested in having you wrestle Ric Flair at WrestleMania XX. Did anyone ever approach you? If not, did you at least hear the rumor?**

**A:** To answer your second question first, yes, I heard the rumor. Les Thatcher, who makes most of my bookings for personal appearances, and some friends were calling me and asking if this was true. But nobody from that company called me.

**Q: Would they have had any luck if they did?**

**A:** I think anything like that is negotiable. It probably would have been a lot of fun.

**Q: Obviously, you're still in great shape. What are the odds of a**

Although Rick Steamboat hasn't wrestled since 1994, he still makes appearances as a guest referee on a semi-regular basis, even getting physical at times. Here he officiates a match between American Dragon and C.M. Punk at a recent Ring Of Honor show. Steamboat frequently appears at ROH shows and is enjoying his involvement.

**comeback, at least for one night only?**

**A:** For me to be comfortable with making a comeback, I would want to have at least four weeks of serious training beforehand. I've been out of the business for almost 10 years, but I still work out regularly. I'm not like those guys who have blown up after their time in the business. I still try to exercise about three times a week.

**Q: Of course, the prospect of you wrestling Flair at WrestleMania XX was intriguing because many fans consider your rivalry with him to be the greatest of all-time. Didn't that rivalry last about 20 years?**

**A:** Not exactly 20, maybe more like 17. It started in 1977 and it didn't really end until '94.

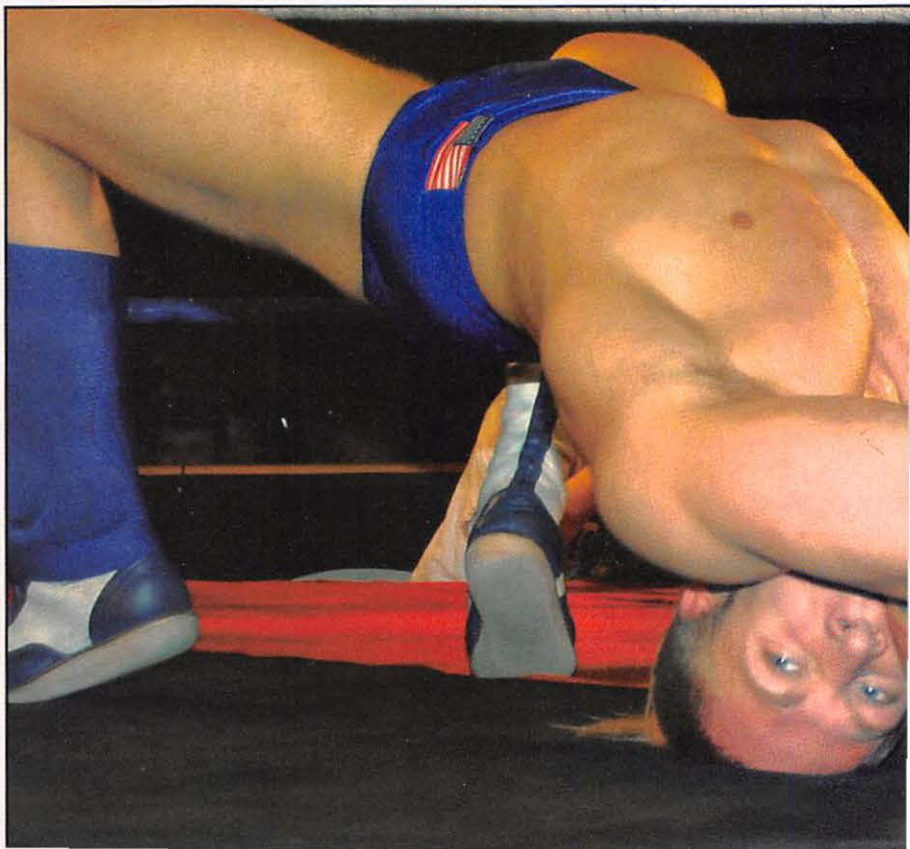
**Q: What led to such great chemistry?**

**A:** When I first went to the Carolinas in 1977, Flair went to [promoter] George Scott and expressed his desire to work something with me. I had just come in as a fresh, new babyface. Flair had already been there for over a year and had pretty well established himself as the number-one heel in the area. I understood that Wahoo McDaniel, a hard-nosed guy

and a great worker, wanted to work with Flair at the same time, but Flair—who was a couple of years older than me—really wanted a younger rival.

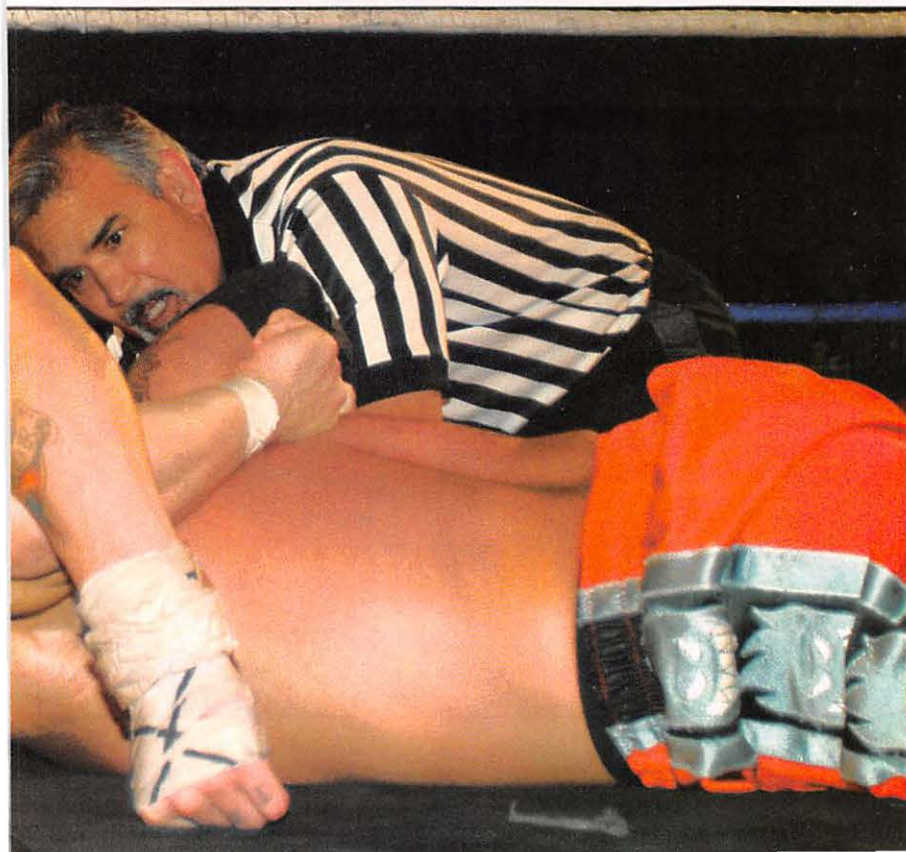
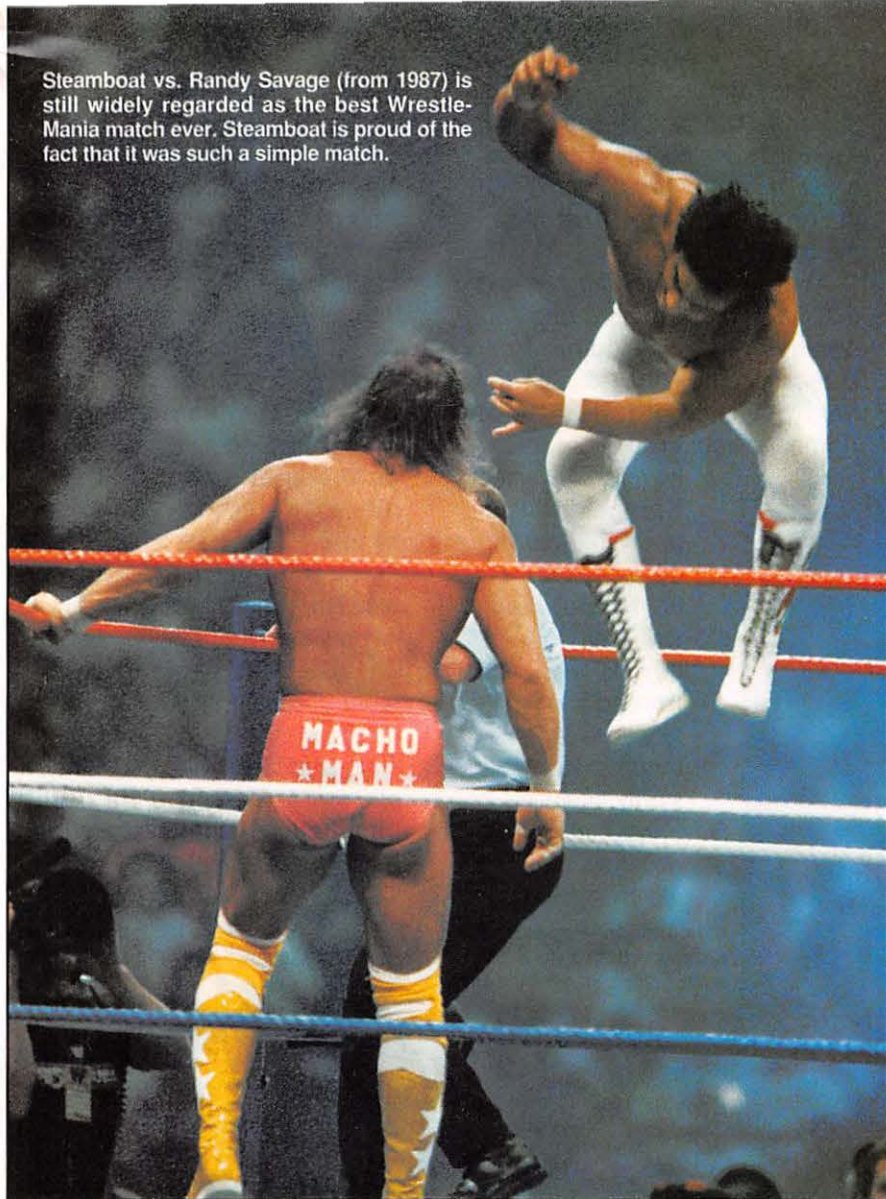
It was a good contrast right from the beginning. I had longer black hair at the time, and Flair had long blond hair. I was a mild babyface, and he was a ruthless egomaniac. That was a good mix, just on paper. But what made it special was how we carried it through. That's where our hearts came in, and our desire to have the best match on every card. We shared that philosophy. We realized the company was riding on us. Our 20- and 30-minute matches went to 40 minutes, then 55, 57, and 59 minutes. When it looked like we'd go to a draw, either I'd win with something cute or he'd pull my tights and get the pin with only 10 seconds left. That would really get the fans stomping their feet. We even had 90-minute draws that had people still on the edge of their seats.

**Q: A couple of years ago, I read an interview that Ric Flair did with the *Baltimore Sun*, and he stated both of you were very competitive with your cardiovascular workouts. Is that true?**





Steamboat vs. Randy Savage (from 1987) is still widely regarded as the best WrestleMania match ever. Steamboat is proud of the fact that it was such a simple match.



**A:** Yes, we were competitive with each other in the gym, and even challenged each other on the StairMasters.

**Q: Who would usually come out on top?**

**A:** Flair. I could lift more weight, and he would do better with the cardio. He was not weak at all, though. On a scale, he was a 10 and I was an eight in terms of cardio. In weight-lifting, I was a 10 and he was an eight. So we were both an 18.

**Q: Was there anyone else who could keep up with you and Flair in terms of cardiovascular fitness during that early era?**

**A:** Actually, there were guys who had to wrestle an hour every night, including Harley Race when he was NWA champion. He had to wrestle the top guy in every territory. But the local promoter wouldn't want Race to win, so they would go for an hour. Although his pace might have been slower, he knew how to work a crowd. His matches always went over with the fans. Jack Brisco did the same when he was champion.

**Q: Did you have your best matches with Flair in the late-'70s and early-'80s, when you were younger, or in the late-'80s and early-'90s, when you were more experienced?**

**A:** The early-'80s, not because we were younger, but because of the territorial system at the time. Flair and I probably had hundreds of matches. During the early-'80s in Jim Crockett's Mid-Atlantic territory, we would go back to the same towns once a week or every two weeks. The fans were more familiar with us. The response was crisper and louder. When I was traveling around with the WWF and WCW in the late-'80s and early-'90s, we went to the big cities like Philly, Dallas, and Chicago, but we didn't return soon enough to make as personal a connection.

My matches with Flair in the early-'80s were better because of that good association with the wrestling fans. I got to know hun-



dreds of fans on a first-name basis. They continually came out to support me. The realism still had a mystique about it, and Flair and I would work snug. We gave everything more of an edge than normal to make our matches more convincing. When the people left the building that night, they would hate Flair, and if I got my butt kicked, they would feel sorry for me.

**Q: The Crockett promotion is evok-**

the contract also stipulated that Jay and I had to split as a team if we didn't win. We signed the contracts in front of the cameras in a very serious manner. That raised the bar on reality.

That five-year run with Jay, and that rivalry with Slaughter and Kernodle, was a high point of my career. Jimmy Crockett said the feud wouldn't go over because Kernodle wouldn't be convincing as a main-eventer. Kernodle was a good mid-carder, but he usually lost on TV. But Sarge took Kernodle under his wing and trained him military-style for three months. Kernodle slowly improved in each match and, about six matches

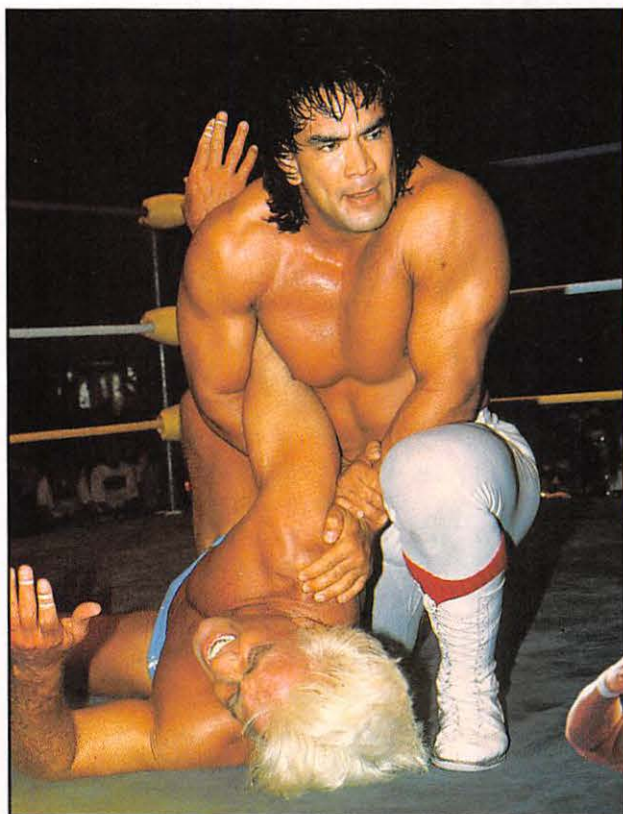
into it, finally won his first match. That gave him credibility.

**Q: I remember that Slaughter gave Kernodle a fancy coat as a gift when he finished his boot camp training. Later in the show, you ran into the ring to save a preliminary wrestler from Kernodle, and he tore off your T-shirt and ripped it to shreds. The following week, you snuck into Kernodle's dressing room, put on the coat, and did another run-in on Kernodle. This time, he tore off the coat and ripped it to shreds, not realizing it was his. Then Slaughter gave him a mighty chewing out.**

**A: Then I went to the announcers' table and said, "That fool ripped up his own coat."**

**Q: And that you had lost only a six-dollar T-shirt. I think the simplicity of those storylines made them work.**

"The Dragon" had been having classic battles with Ric Flair for more than a decade (left) before he finally beat him to claim one of the sport's ultimate prizes, the NWA World title, in 1989 (below).



ing a lot of nostalgia with these fanfests and reunion shows popping up throughout the Mid-Atlantic area these days. What were some of the reasons why that promotion was so hot in the early-'80s? Other than you and Flair, of course.

**A:** We had a legitimacy to our angles that couldn't be found anywhere else. When Jay Youngblood and I were supposed to challenge Sgt. Slaughter and Don Kernodle for the NWA World tag belts inside of a cage in Greensboro, we had a contract signing in Jim Crockett Jr.'s office. Some commissioners and other important people were present. In addition to the cage,





**A:** It's like the feud Jay and I had with the Briscos. The Briscos were the number-two babyface team and they wanted to turn heel so they could have a series of matches with us. As with the Slaughter-Kernodle angle, Crockett didn't think it would work. But all we had to do was lay a foundation for a compelling story. The Briscos' heel turn came when Jack put a figure-four on Jay during a TV match, and Jerry jumped off the top rope and onto the figure-four, severely injuring Jay's knee. Jay's rehab was documented on TV. Week after week, I helped Jay through rehab and worked out with him. Then, finally, he was able to walk on his own. Then we were jogging down the beach. The first time, he couldn't keep up with me. The next time, he ran about even with me. Then, the final time, just like Rocky running past Apollo Creed in the movies, Jay sprinted past me on that

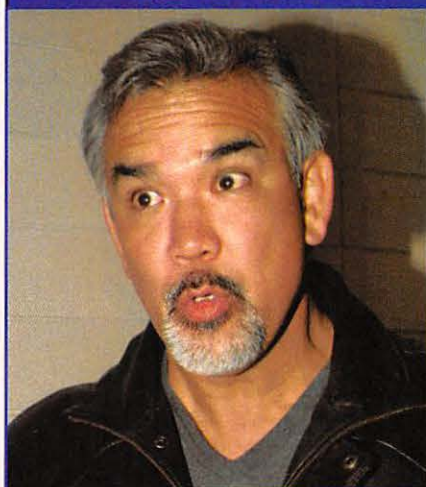
beach. That helped our matches with the Briscos do big, big money at the time.

**Q: I think Crockett underestimated Jerry Brisco's ability as a heel. He turned out to be very obnoxious.**

**A:** Jerry was great as a heel. He really came out of his shell. Jack would just say, "Tell 'em, Gerald..." He'd always call him "Gerald," just like an older brother would. Then Jerry would go off with his big mouth. They were a lot of fun to work with in the ring. Many times, I had to cover my face because I was laughing.

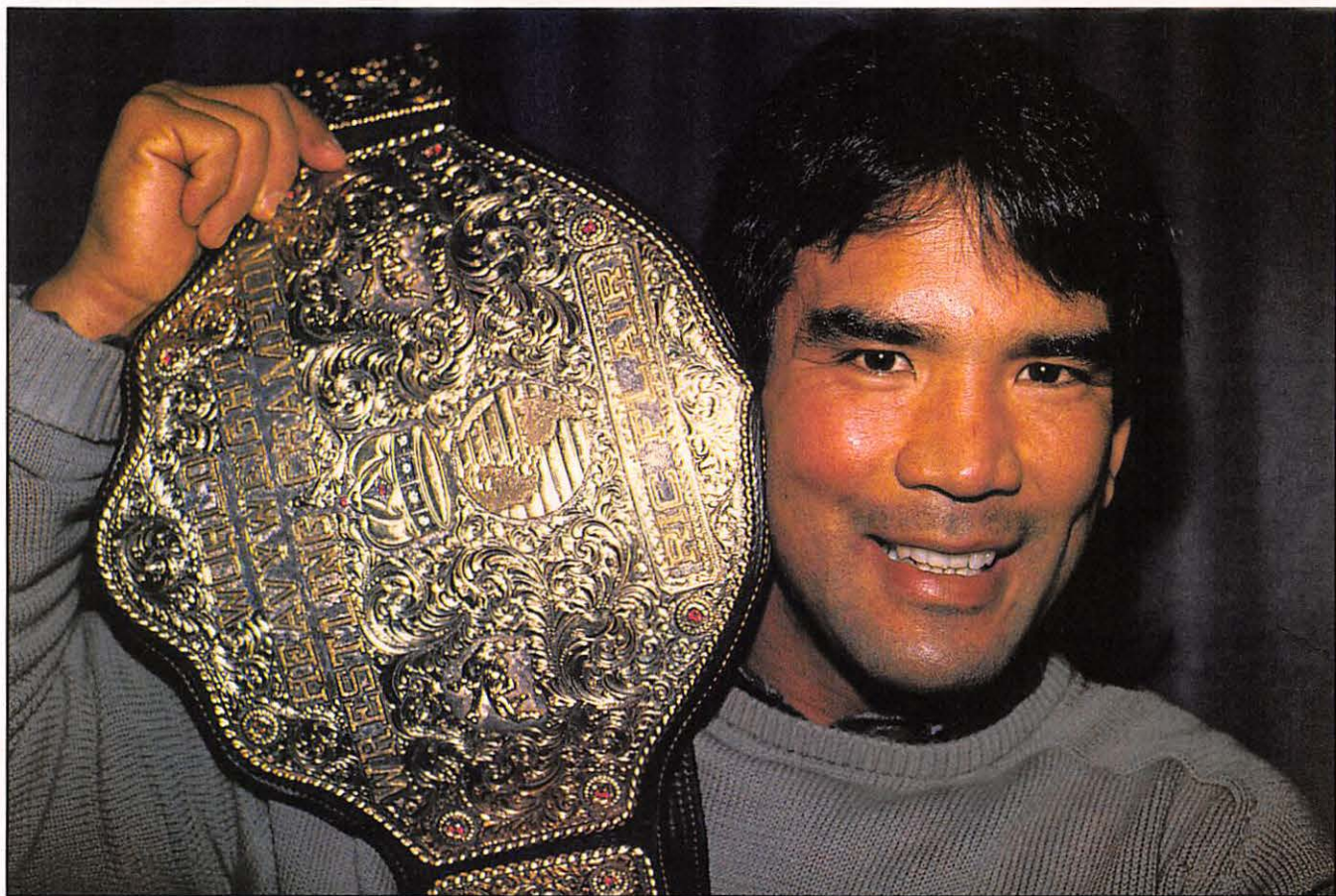
**Q: Jerry really emerged from Jack's shadow at that point.**

**A:** Absolutely. Jack, being a former NWA champion, his work spoke for itself. Jerry, to his own surprise, turned out to be great on the mike and did most of the talking for their interviews. It helped his confidence immensely, and his work became even better in the ring.



**"[The Briscos] wanted to turn heel so they could have a series of matches with us. As with the Slaughter-Kernodle angle, Crockett didn't think it would work. But all we had to do was lay a foundation for a compelling story."**

That's Steamboat proudly holding the NWA World belt. He only held a world championship once in his glorious career, and that one reign lasted but 86 days.







A partnership with Jay Youngblood yielded four NWA World tag titles between 1980 and 1983 and some of the greatest tag team bouts in history.

**Q: There seems to be something missing in wrestling since those territorial days. I suppose you would concede that today's wrestlers are more athletic. But what would you say is the missing ingredient?**

**A:** The psychology is missing. Guys have raised the bar on the bumps, and Mick Foley is an example of someone who has brought together both elements. Sure, he fell from the top of the cage and through that table at King of the

Ring, but the psychology was still there. Some guys, though, start doing the crazy stuff only 30 seconds into a 15-minute match.

**Q: You mean they jump up from the shattered table and set up the ladder again.**

**A:** I do three-day wrestling camps, usually at the request of independent promoters, and then I'll go ahead and make a personal appearance at whatever show they are having that week. During those camps, I say, "I'm not here

to show you headlocks, how to take crazy bumps, or how to do 450s. If you can do that, fine. I'm here to show you *when* to do this stuff. Most importantly, I try to teach them how to sell without dying. Some guys think they're doing a great job selling, but they're really dying and losing the attention of the crowd. I try to show them how to do that "hope" spot, and why those are so crucial to a match.

Here's an example of what's wrong with wrestling today. You'll have two guys fighting outside the ring. One guy gets the better of the other and puts the fallen wrestler on a table. Then he climbs to the top turnbuckle and crashes through his opponent and the table. The fans will say, "Wow, what a bump! They've got to be hurt!" You tell me, who should be the first guy back in the ring?

**Q: I would hope it's the guy who jumped off the top turnbuckle.**

**A:** You would hope. So often, the guy who is smashed through the table will get back into the ring first, and then the two guys will start crisscrossing the ropes. So what did that bump mean? It didn't mean anything because they obviously didn't get hurt. All you have to do is put a little logic into your matches. Building a match is like making love to your wife. You start out slow, then you build to the high point.

Flair and I, back when we were going to the same towns week after week, knew how to build toward that climax. The week before, we might have had a kick-punch brawl that emptied the locker room and ended with a pull-apart. The next week, we might have a stipulation, maybe a no-DQ match. We would begin those matches standing in the ring, almost in crouching positions, just trying to grab the fingers or wrist, then pull back. Then, maybe after six or seven minutes, we'd have our first lockup. If that no-DQ rematch happened today, I guarantee the babyface would charge



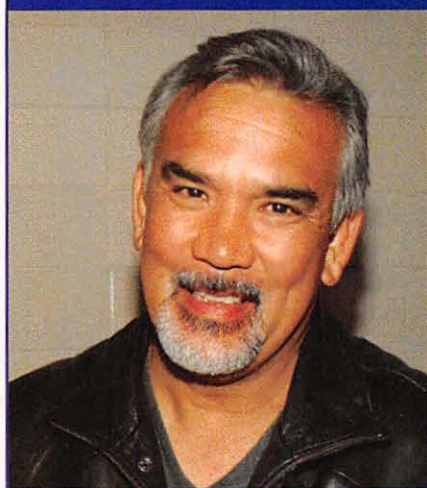
the ring, slide under that bottom rope, and start kicking and punching the heel immediately. But you should never give fans what they're expecting. Do you know why that is?

**Q: When you give them something they don't expect, that forces them to pay attention to the match.**

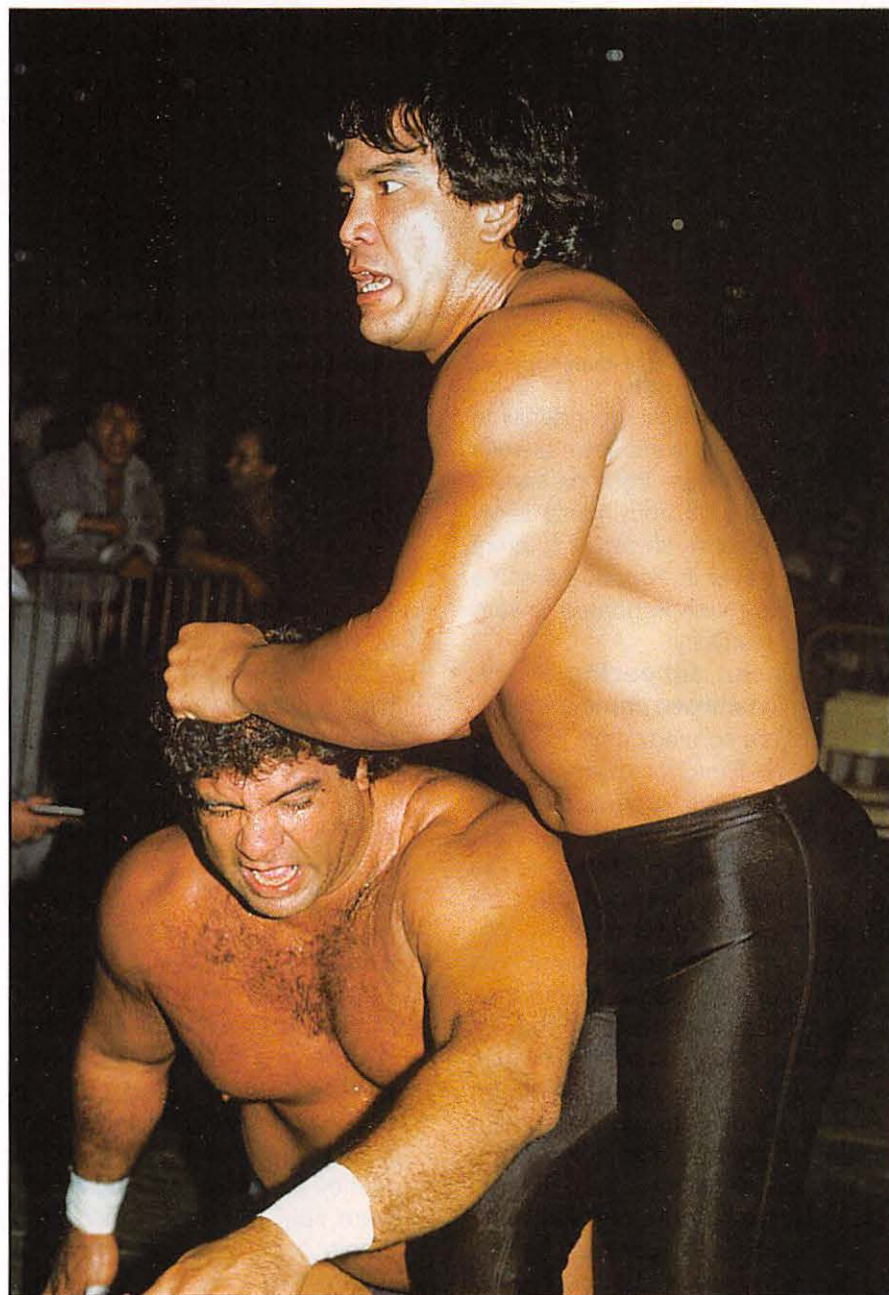
**A:** Right. The fans will be biting their nails in anticipation. They expected Flair and me to tear into each other like badgers. But think about real human nature for a moment.

**Q: In reality, both guys have had a week to cool off. They would naturally approach the next match with caution.**

**A:** Yes, you might get mad at somebody in everyday life, but are you in the same rage a full week later? Of course not. You can always get to the wild brawl in that no-DQ match, but take 40 minutes to build toward it. At one indy show, I saw a match in which the object was to send your opponents through as many tables as possible. It was stupid theory. The fans



**"They expected Flair and me to tear into each other like badgers. But think about real human nature for a moment ... you might get mad at somebody in everyday life, but are you in the same rage a full week later? Of course not."**



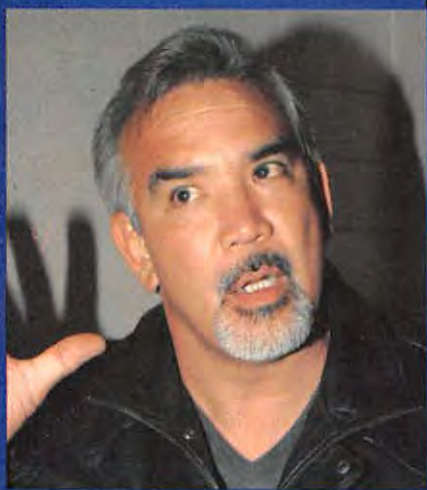
Steamboat tangles with Don Muraco, one of the many men to have told him he brought out the very best in him in the ring.

screamed when they saw guys going through the first couple of tables, but by the time they went through the fifth and sixth tables, it didn't mean anything.

I approached the wrestlers after the match. I said, "Why not have just one table?" After the babyfaces could pull the table away from the guardrails, have your match. Later, the heels go out of the ring and unfold one side of the table legs. Have your match. Then the babyfaces get out of the ring and unfold the other table legs. Have your match. The heels pull the table to the ring apron. Have your match. The faces get the table halfway into the ring. Have your match. Once the table is in the ring, have your time getting to the finish. Can you not see the suspense in that? As it was, those guys cost the promoter six tables.

**Q: I remember when a manager wrapping a wrestler's fist in tape was enough to knock somebody out.**





**"Some guys have admitted to me that they were amazed that Flair and I could go for an hour, because they themselves would get lost after 15 minutes. It's not their fault. It's the nature of the TV product today."**

**A:** In Florida, Boris Malenko would get so much mileage out of a shoestring in his tights. He would reach down for that string, pull it out five or six inches. The fans would yell, and he would tell them to be quiet. A few minutes later, he'd pull the string halfway out, then shove it back in his tights. Then he'd wrap the string around both hands and go to choke the face, the referee would turn around, and Boris would shove the string back in his tights again. He would milk it for 30 minutes and finally choke the babyface with it. So much psychology was involved there. I tell these stories to the younger guys. When they use it in the ring, people end up screaming and hollering. Because a couple of generations have gone by, those old tricks get a huge reaction.

**Q:** Have you encountered some indy wrestlers who act too cool to make it realistic?

**A:** I've encountered some who were too cool to tell them anything. Some of the young wrestlers, a

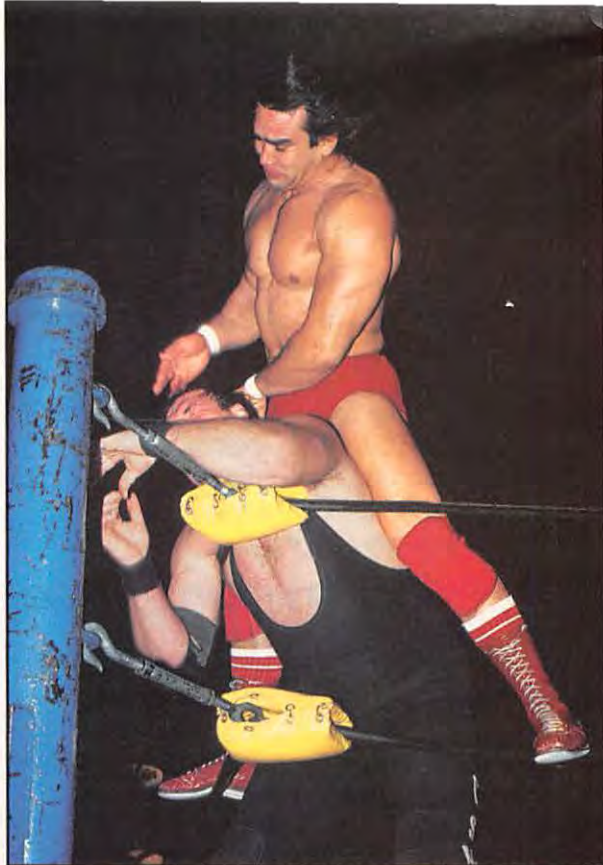
very small number of them, think they know it all because they've worked in the indies for five years. With about eight matches a month, that works out to be 450 matches over five years. I did 300 matches in my first year in the business and kept that going for 20 years. So I've had over 6,000 matches. There's no substitute for experience. Remember, less is more. A main event that comes across as a real test of a match is usually very refreshing after an undercard full of high spots and weapons. Unfortunately, these

guys don't have the opportunity to go back to the same town a week later and to learn from the experience. They go from house show to house show, always in different towns, never in front of the same fans. So much is geared toward the TV mentality.

**Q:** You mean squeezing everything in between commercials?

**A:** There are so many guys to showcase on *Raw*, for example, that everything has to be simplified to seven- or eight-minute matches. Some guys have admitted to me that they were amazed that Flair and I could go for an hour, because they themselves would get lost after 15 minutes. It's not their fault. It's the nature of the TV product today. Sure, these guys are great bump-takers, great athletes, and great gymnasts. But they're trying to shove too much into too little time.

During a three-day wrestling camp I did in Rhode Island, I met a guy who was a chef during the week and a wrestler on the weekends. Sometimes he wore a mask,



Sgt. Slaughter was one of Steamboat's top rivals in the first half of his career, although they clashed more often than not in tag team competition.

sometimes not. And he usually wrestled the same opponent all the time. He took some of my lessons to heart and, that weekend, he and his opponent planned the finish—but nothing else. He called my hotel room on a Sunday night at 10:00 and said, thanks to my advice, he had the best match of his life with this guy. The match came off far more natural, and the fans were really into it. Too often, these wrestlers are too concerned with linking their high spots together and not about the pace of a realistic match. Simply linking together high spots makes a match look set up.

**Q:** I agree. The slickest Luchador matches make me lose interest.

**A:** It loses your attention. The wrestler in Rhode Island said he worked off a simple headlock for most of the match and blew the roof off the place. Although there were only 150 people there, the whole experience gave him so much more satisfaction. He said the night ended with high-fives and hugs in the locker room.

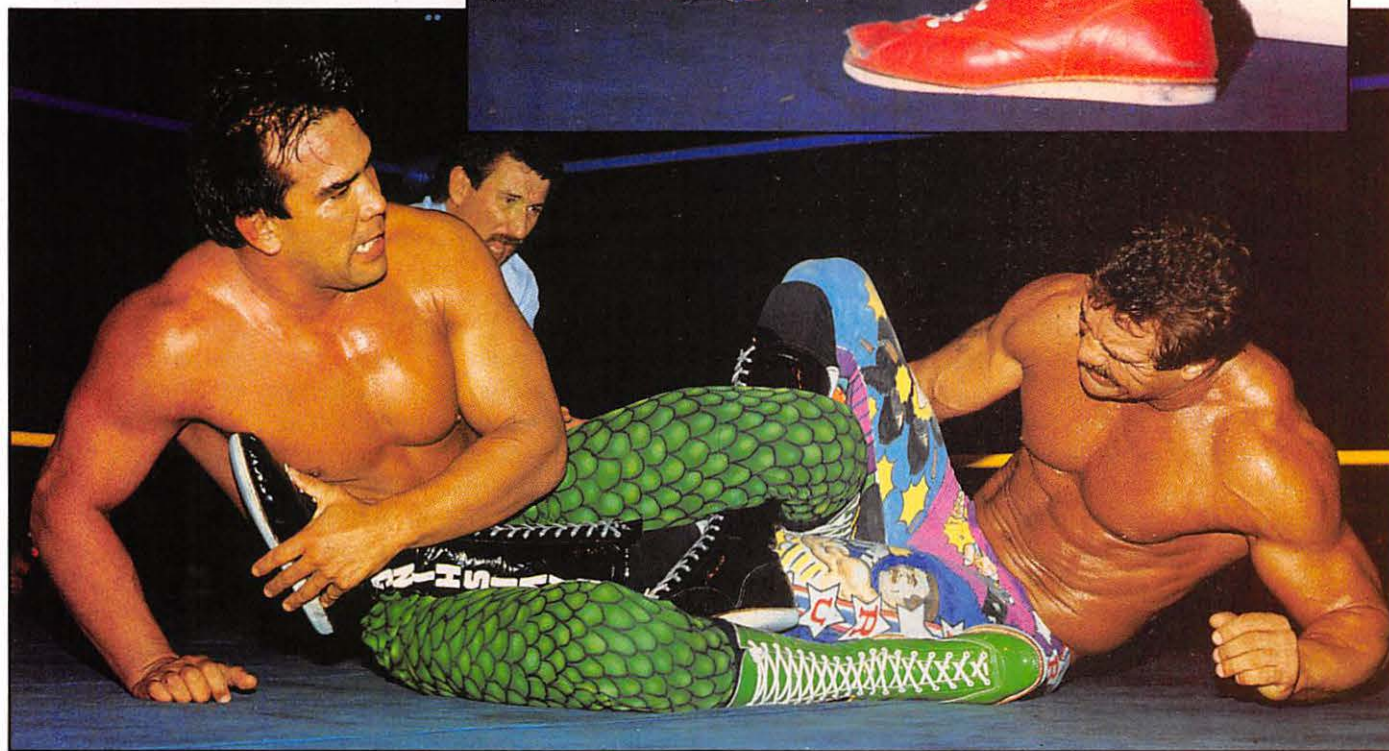
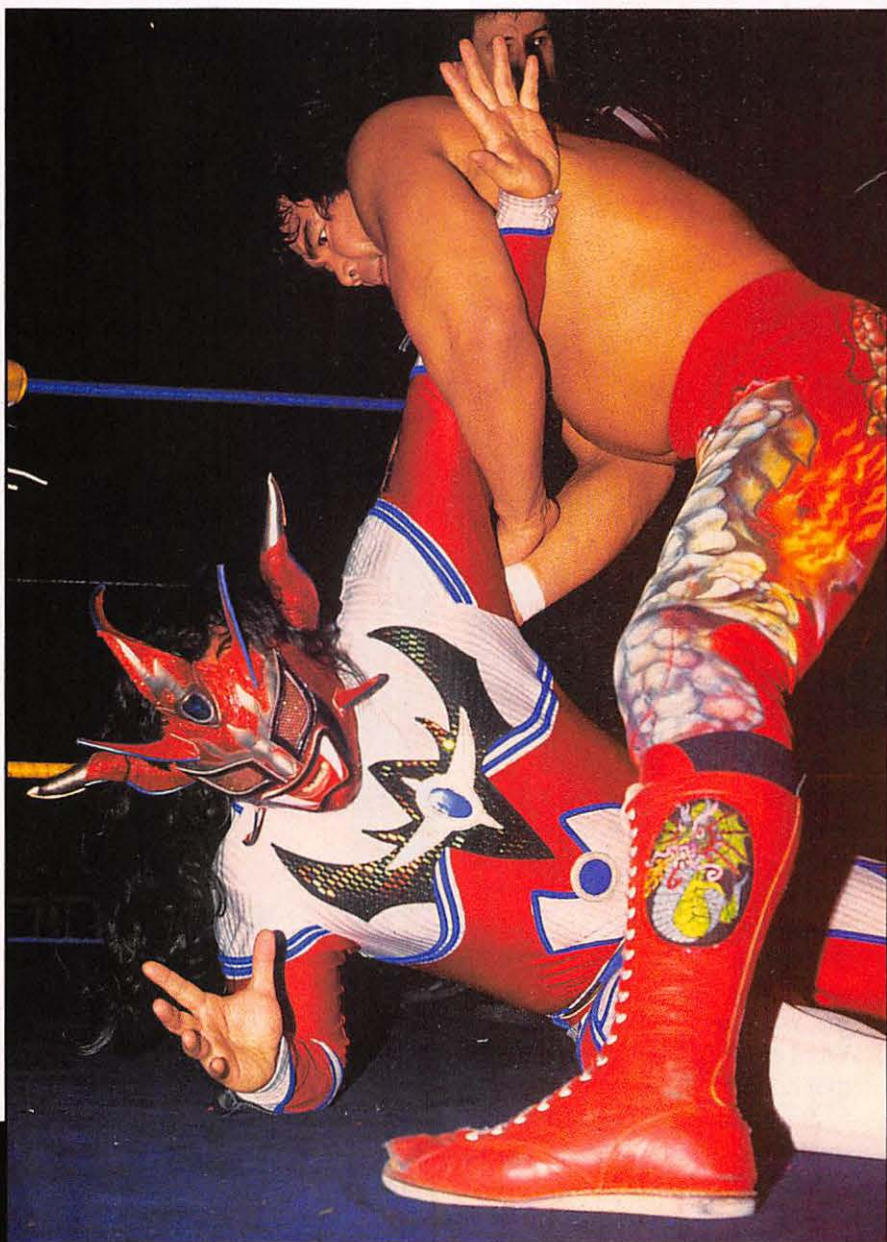


I have a simple technique in my wrestling camp. If I have 20 guys, I'll ask them to pair up and have a five-minute match. I tell them, "I'll stay on the sidelines and, without telling me directly, I want you to have a match and show me who is the face and who is the heel." Nine times out of 10, I am not able to tell. Now, with all my experience and everything I know about the business, how can they expect fans to tell the difference? Those fundamentals are definitely missing.

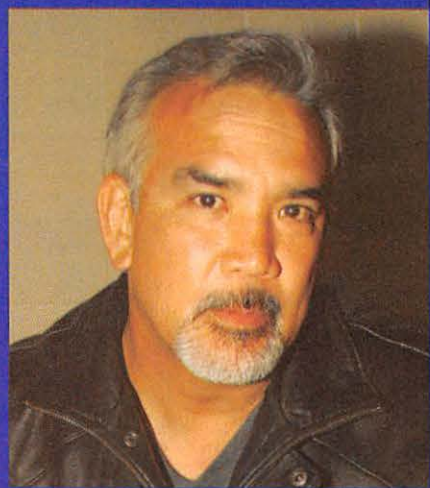
**Q: Speaking of faces and heels, you were a fan favorite your entire career. Did you ever want to be the bad guy for a change?**

**A:** I wanted to do it in 1991 during my last run with the WWF. After a decent run in WCW, I suppose Vince McMahon wanted to make an example out of me by putting me in opening matches. Vince told me that he would give me a main event spot after I had established myself as this "Dragon" character, but I was set up for failure. Four or five months into it, I went to Pat

It didn't really matter if he was in the ring with a smallish high-flyer like Jushin Liger (right) or a power-oriented foe such as Rick Rude (below)—it really was difficult for Steamboat to have a truly bad match with anyone.





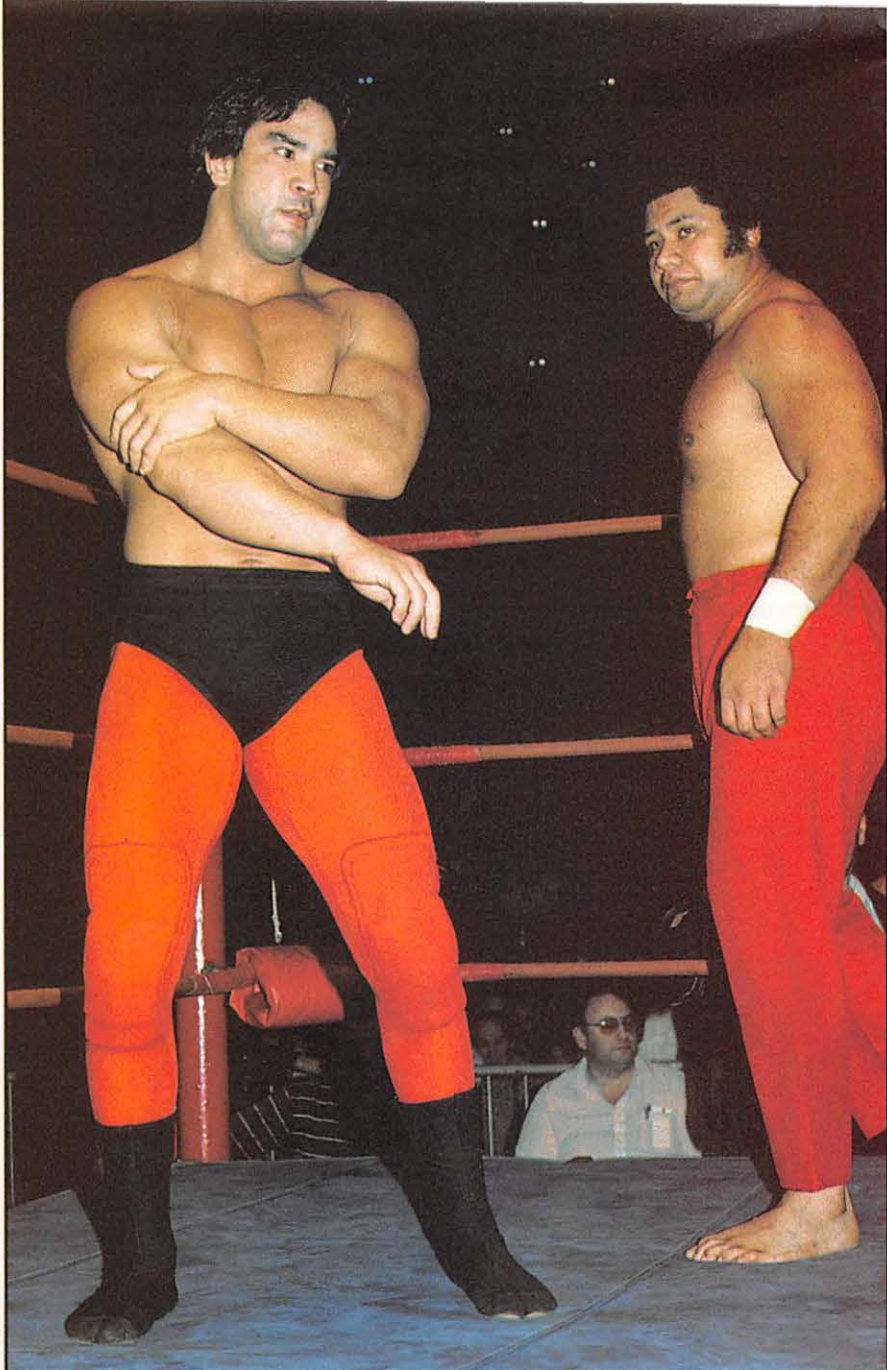


**"I'm proud that I had a successful career without ever having to turn heel."**

Patterson and said, "After I go out there with my mouthful of kerosene and blow fire from that torch, and I take off this stupid rubber dragon tail and the rubber wings, there's nothing more I can do to establish myself in front of these fans who've already seen me work as Ricky Steamboat. What can I do in that ring after all that hoopla?"

So I told Pat, "I started in this business in 1974 and here it is 1991. Before I get out, I'd like to have a run as a heel, just to see if I can score." Pat said, "Rick, you've been such a consummate baby-face your entire career that if you wanted to work an angle with Hulk Hogan, and you went out there with a chainsaw and cut his arm off, the fans would probably say, 'Hogan, you deserved it.'" That's why it didn't happen. But I'm proud that I had a successful career without ever having to turn heel. The greatest stars—Ric Flair, Hulk Hogan, Randy Savage, Bret Hart—all had to switch back and forth to keep themselves fresh. Most of the time, it wasn't necessary for me to do that.

Today, it isn't as important whether you're a heel or a face. Many times, you'll hear the heel



Steamboat fondly remembers a 1991 series of matches he had with Haku—who was once his tag team partner—although not everyone in the WWF appreciated what they did in the ring at the time.

get applause. Why is that? It's because that heel goes out there and entertains today's wrestling fan. He has their respect. But regarding the dynamics of an actual match, there must be a good guy and a bad guy. That dates back to the Stone Age. You must establish that immediately in a match. The best way is to begin an interaction with the fans.

**Q: Even if the heel has to use the "Sit down, fat boy" line?**

**A:** Sure. If a particular section is

stone-cold quiet, you tell those fans, "Don't listen to anything this guy tells you. If he tells you to shut up and sit down, you tell *him* to shut up and sit down." So when that heel *does* tell them to shut up and sit down, that whole front row is up and screaming at the guy.

**Q: Then, before you know it, all four sides of the arena have been pulled into it.**

**A:** Exactly. Even if you pull off 10 high spots in a row, you won't get that kind of reaction from a crowd.



**Q: I suppose the magic of live wrestling is that it's interactive. Otherwise, it's like watching television.**

**A:** Those people at the live show have paid for their tickets, so get them involved in the match, get them inside that ring. My greatest joy is watching these young guys at a live show, implementing what I've taught them at camp earlier in the week. I tell these young wrestlers, "This promoter has given you a ring. Your job is to entertain the people so they go home and tell their neighbors what a fantastic show this was. Instead of 200 fans, you'll have 300, then maybe thousands of people."

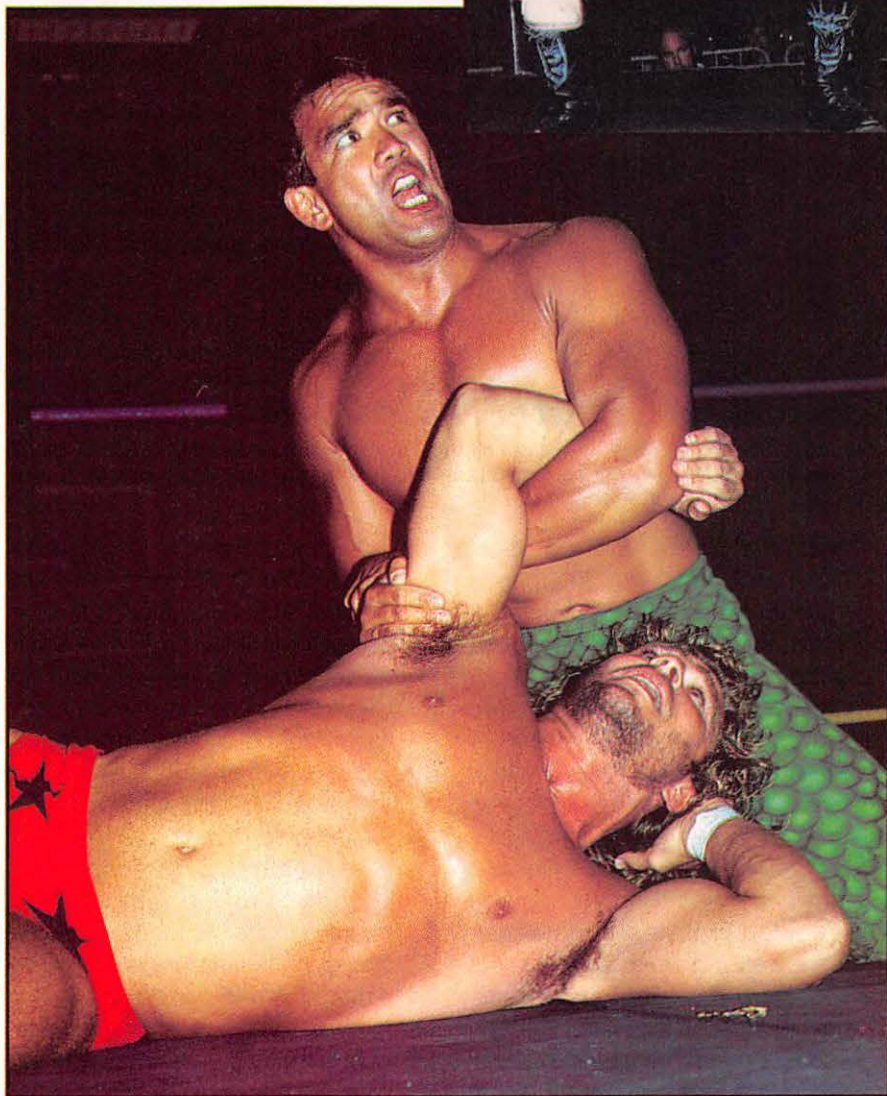
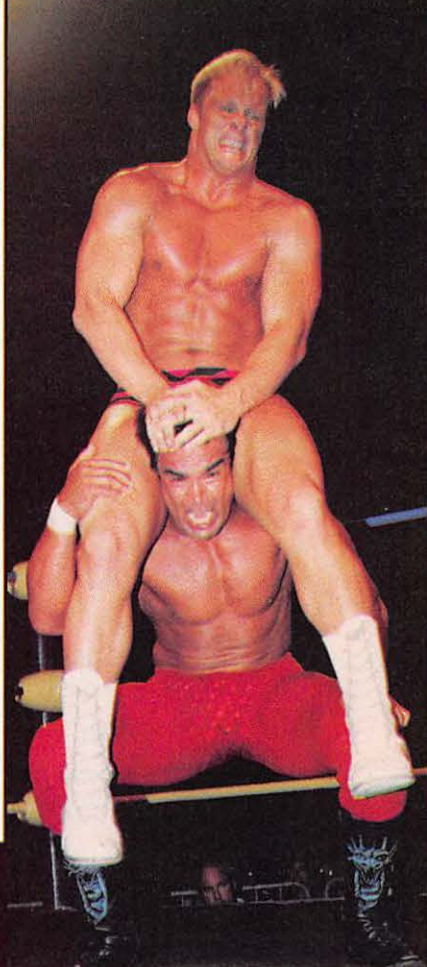
**Q: While you're talking about pulling people into a match, I have to ask you about your match against Randy Savage at WrestleMania III. Whenever we have ranked the WrestleMania matches for our magazines, Steamboat vs. Savage has always been number one. Why did that match work so well?**

**A:** I don't know what I'm asked about most, my 1989 series of matches against Flair or my match against Savage at WrestleMania III. Savage is like today's wrestlers in the sense that he likes matches planned step-by-step, but he was good at incorporating psychology into it. With Flair and I, we just wanted to know the finish and that was it. In some ways, I would consider Flair and me just winging it to be more professional.

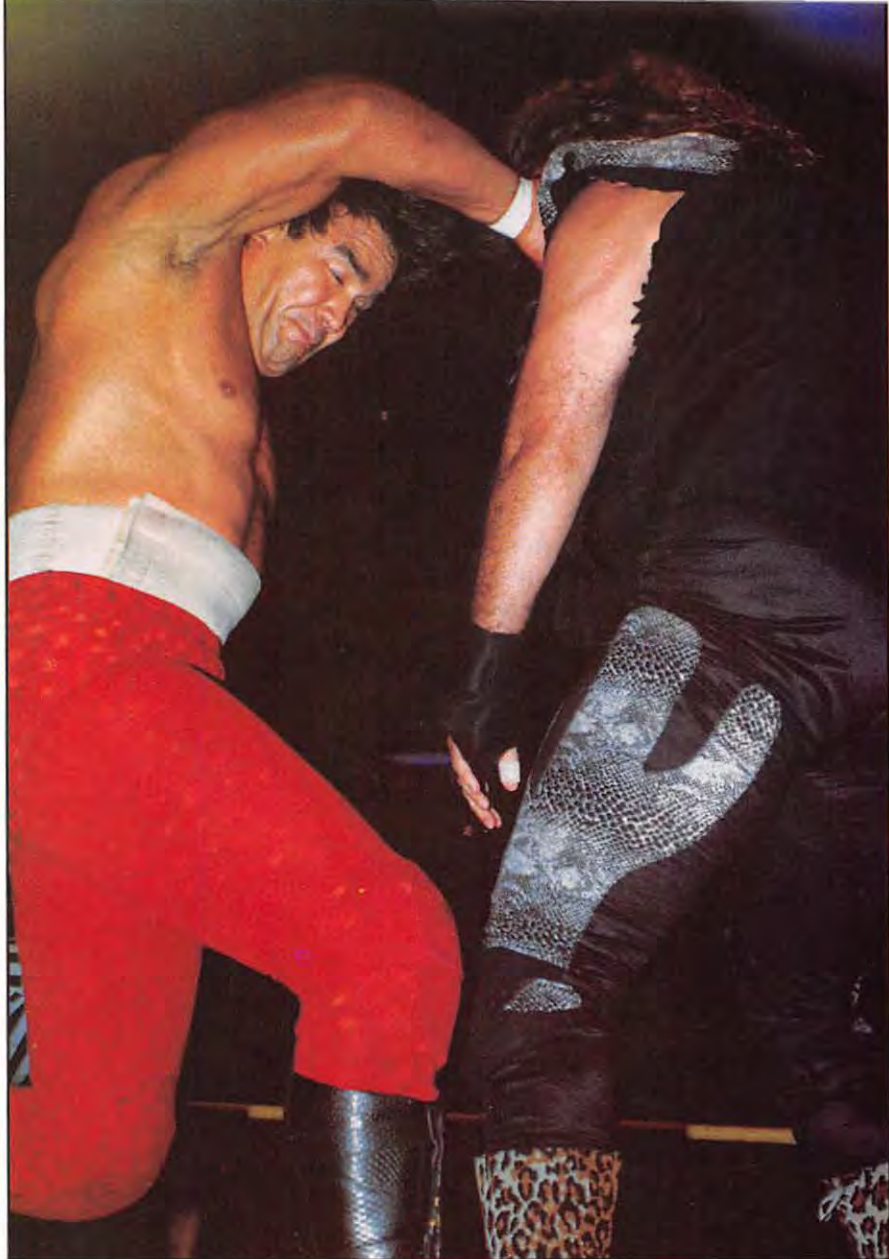
Regarding WrestleMania III, Savage and I knew it would be a big, big show at the Silverdome, with a capacity of nearly 100,000. We knew Andre the Giant vs. Hulk Hogan would sell the show, but we knew Andre wasn't feeling well at the time. Savage and I knew we could steal that show. There was nothing fantastic about that match, no chairs, tables, or ladders. Instead, we painted a picture of two guys really trying to beat each other. We did that by having 22 false finishes in a 15-minute match. Customarily, the

babyface would shine at first with some cute armdrags and high spots, the heel would get his heat, and then it would be time to end the match, often with about two or three false finishes for each guy. Savage and I wanted to do something different. Sure, we got George Steele into the picture. We did that out of respect for George because he was a great guy. Otherwise, it was just two wrestlers who wanted to win the match. We wanted fans to have no idea who would finally get the one-two-three. I believe Savage went for a bodyslam, and I rolled him up for a small package out of

A lot of good memories of matches with Steve Austin (right) and Brian Pillman (below) came flooding back to Steamboat when asked about those men. He has nothing but praise for Austin and recalls that both Austin and Pillman had an incredible passion for performing.







Steamboat cites Mick Foley as an example of someone who has taken a lot of brutal yet memorable bumps in his career, but always made sure that those bumps meant something in the context of a match.

nowhere. People were so surprised there was a lull and then, a moment later, the place erupted.

**Q: That is viewed as the best match of Savage's career. Your feud with Steve Austin is also credited with taking his career to a higher level. What was it like to work with him?**

**A:** Steve is a great guy, a good learner. Shane Douglas and I wrestled him and Brian Pillman in some great tag matches. I remember there was a blizzard at a sold-out spot show at an old armory in the northern part of Georgia. The ring announcer informed the crowd that a blizzard was coming, and that

they should consider leaving right away. When Pillman, Austin, Shane, and I went out there, it seemed like there were only about 12 people left. We knew we would be snowed in anyway, so we wrestled in front of those people for 40 minutes. Austin and Pillman had the same mentality as Shane and me. We didn't want to ever short-change anyone. I never short-changed anyone with a three-minute match. My idea of short-changing the fans was paring down a match from 40 minutes to 20.

What I miss most about wrestling is the ring time. That was my time. No one could take that away

from me and my partner. When we could make that ring shine, that was the most fun for me. I don't miss the traveling, politicking, ass-kissing, or backstabbing. A lot of guys who were jealous of me would be nice to my face, but hated to follow me, so they bad-mouthed me. During my final run in the WWF in 1991, I often wrestled Haku in the first or second match. Haku and I had no angle, just cold guys in a cold match, and we blew the roof off the house. No chairs, tables, or ladders, just telling a story with the match. [WWF agent] Jay Strongbow told me the rest of the card hated it, but I said I didn't make the lineup. He replied that Vince should put me back in the main event because the rest of the card couldn't follow me and my partner.

One time, a wrestler walked up to me and said, "Steamboat, you're the common denominator. I've always had my best matches with you." Flair told me the same. Lex Luger also walked up to me and said it. So did Jake "The Snake" Roberts, Don Muraco, and the Brisco brothers. I always seemed to be that "other" guy. In Crockett Promotions, when a guy was told that he was supposed to work a program with me for six months, that guy would get himself in the gym and started working out because he knew I liked to go 40 minutes. After the program, that wrestler would often come up to me and say I made him a better wrestler.

**Q: I would think that common denominator analogy applied to your matches with Steve Austin as well. Didn't you injure yourself during a match with Austin?**

**A:** I now have two herniated disks at the bottom of my spine. It was a bump I had taken a thousand times. We were fighting on the top turnbuckle, and he gave me a headbutt. Normally, I would take a flat-back bump. But both of us were wearing baby oil that night and some of it must have gotten on the top rope, and I slipped.



landed in a sitting position on my butt. That resulted in spinal compression. Maybe years of wrestling was a factor, too. I felt serious pain in my back and down my legs. I went to a specialist at Duke University and underwent an MRI, and I was diagnosed with two herniated disks, one of which was almost ruptured.

The doctor explained that a disk is like an inner tube, and a piece of one disk had broken off, making it very weak. He said, "You could probably continue to wrestle. I won't say it will be the first body slam or the 20th, but you will rupture." Then he put up an X-ray of a lady with two long screws about four to six inches long to hold the vertebrae together. He said, "If this happens to you, your life will totally change." Since he was the third doctor to give me the same prognosis, I decided to retire. I was lacking only three months for a 20-year career, and although I still wanted to continue in my heart, I didn't have much choice. If that hadn't happened, I'd probably still be working today like Flair. And the fans would be saying, "All right, Steamboat, get out already."

**Q: How do you feel when you see Flair still wrestling on TV at 55 years of age?**

**A:** (Sighs) I know ... he should get out. He shouldn't work. He's great on the mike, and that should be good enough.

**Q: I'm surprised by his busy in-ring schedule.**

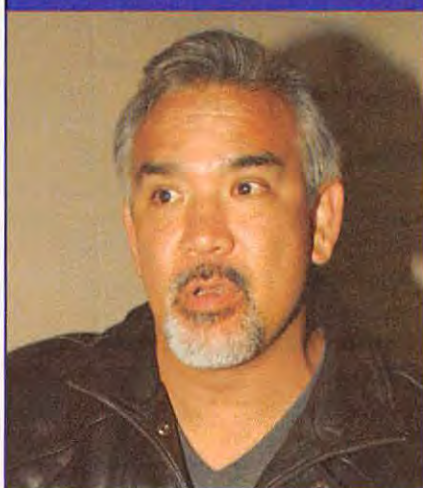
**A:** I am, too. And I understand he's had a neck problem lately. (Pauses) He wants to have the longest active career in the history of the business. It's partly his ego. But Flair is all for this business. He's made a ton of money and he has a well-deserved reputation as the best wrestler to put on a pair of tights. I always give him praise and thanks for affecting my career in a very positive way. When I went to the WWF in late-'84, he stayed with Crockett Promotions. When he went to the WWF in 1992, I was in WCW. I

would have loved to have had a run with him in the WWF to see if we could work the same magic and have those great 45- and 50-minute matches.

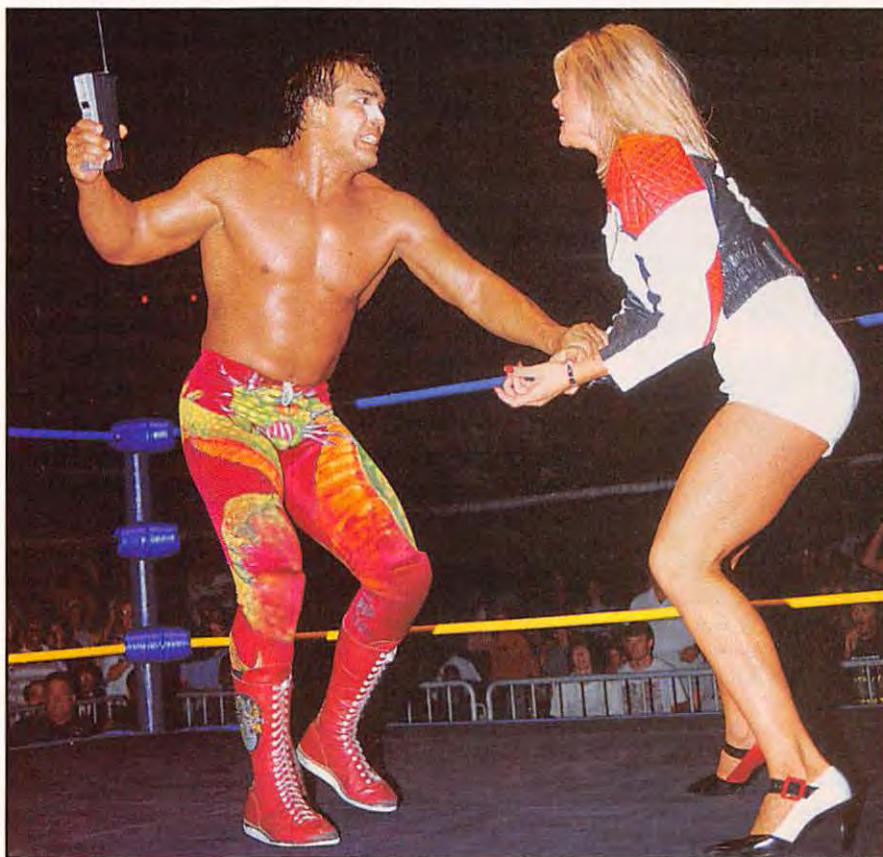
**Q: But you are fairly active as a special referee on the independent circuit. You seem like the reincarnation of Tommy Young. Is that deliberate?**

**A:** No, that hasn't been a conscious effort. To me, Young is the best of all-time. During my matches with Flair, he was Johnny on the spot, making that baseball slide and sometimes sliding right outside the ring. So there was Tommy standing on the floor, slapping the ring apron for the count. I knew he was trying to showcase himself, so I would just give him a wink. It was a great piece. He did a good job of keeping pace with our matches.

My problem with the indies is that the referee never has law and order. Tag team matches almost instantly turn into four-way brawls and they don't hesitate to bring weapons into the ring. They'll look

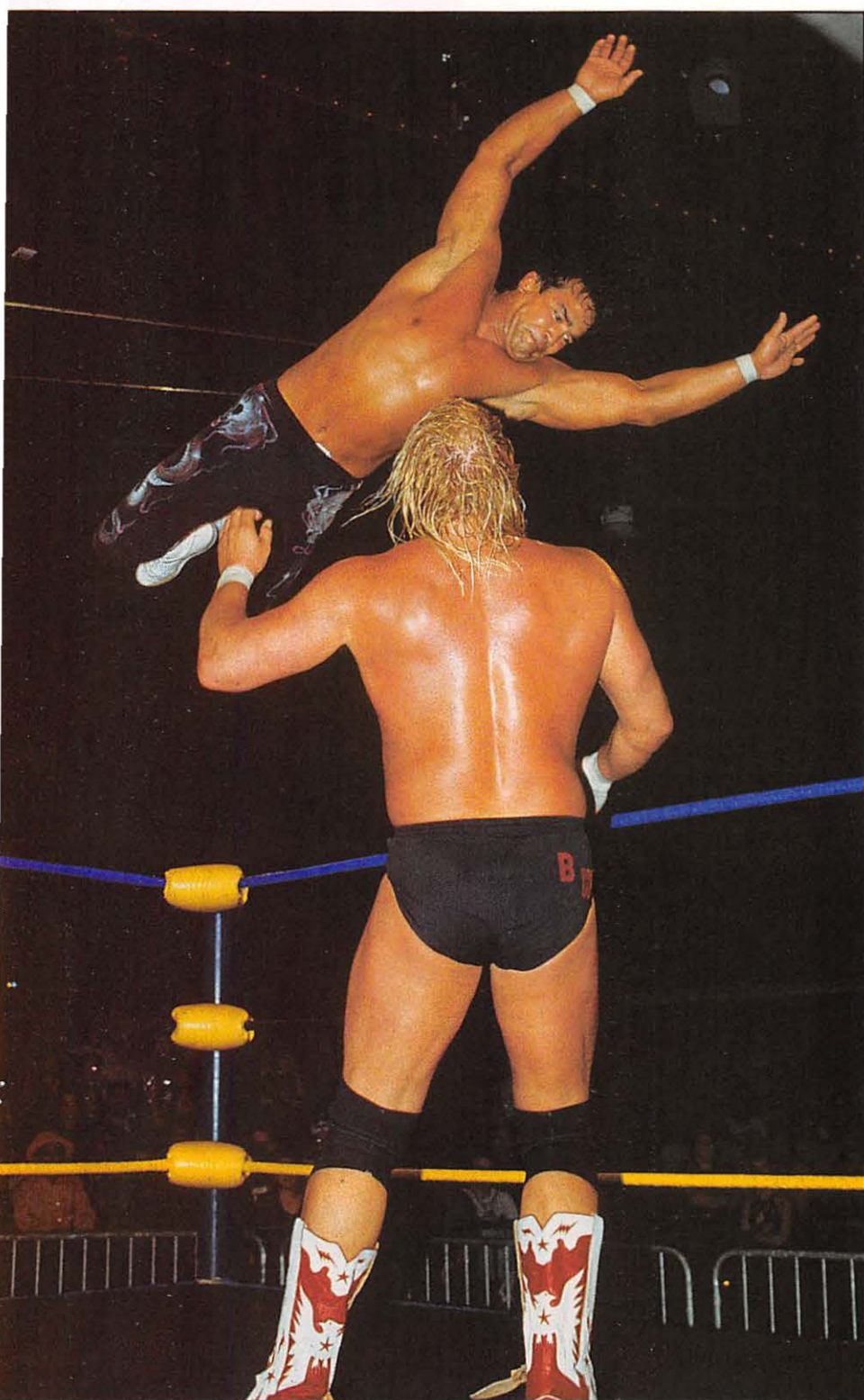


**"I was diagnosed with two herniated disks, one of which was almost ruptured ... I decided to retire. I was lacking only three months for a 20-year career, and although I still wanted to continue in my heart, I didn't have much choice."**



That's Madusa who's causing some problems in the ring for Steamboat when she was a member of The Dangerous Alliance in WCW in the early-1990s.





Less is more is one simple concept that Steamboat tries to drill into the heads of young wrestlers at the camps he occasionally holds. His main finisher through much of his career was a simple flying bodypress. Simple but exciting ... and effective.

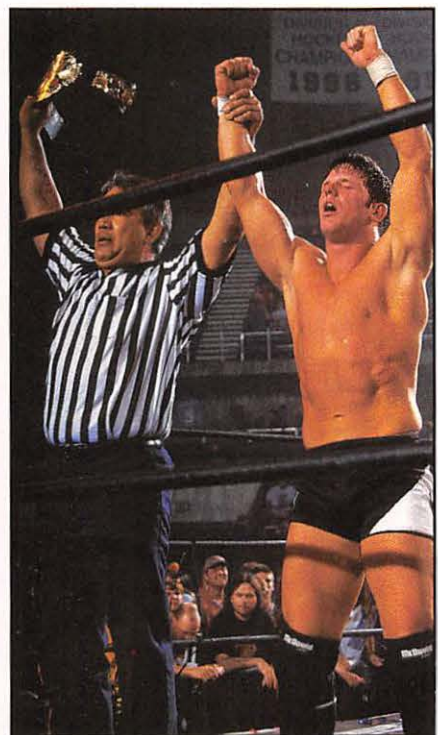
at the referee, say, "Screw you!" and bash somebody over the head with a chair. You must establish the third guy in the ring. It's as simple as locking up and breaking at the referee's com-

mand in the opening minute. That establishes the man with the shield on his shirt. That makes his position more important, so when you do something underhanded behind his back, people get even

madder. I try to tell younger guys that less means so much more in a match. I say, "Save your bodies. A lot of you have aspirations of joining WWE. But even if that doesn't happen, you can still have a lucrative career for a number of years on the indy circuit."

**Q: I suppose young wrestlers start thinking seriously about that after suffering their first injury. By the way, I would be remiss if I didn't ask about Ricky Jr. A lot of our readers would remember him as your "little dragon." What is he doing these days?**

**A:** I'm actually Richard Jr. and he's Richard the third, so Bonnie and I call him "Little Richie." He's 16



Steamboat was the man to hand A.J. Styles the NWA-TNA X title belt when he became the first man to win it two summers ago. He won't rule out wrestling a few more matches himself under the right circumstances.

years old, about 6'2" and 200 pounds. He's the star middle line-backer on his varsity football team and the only freshman to make varsity in a starting position. He's one of the strongest on the team, squatting 450 pounds and dead-lifting 500 as a 10th grader. Richie is also an A and B student in school. Because I occasionally took him on the road during my



wrestling days, he has seen the world and is a well-rounded and polite young man. At the age of 10, he started racing cars. He's now in his sixth year of racing. This summer, he's racing a late-model "legends" car, his first full-size race car, much like the Winston Cup and NASCAR. We often work on his car at my shop. Right now, we're actively looking for sponsors, and the shop is our base of operations.

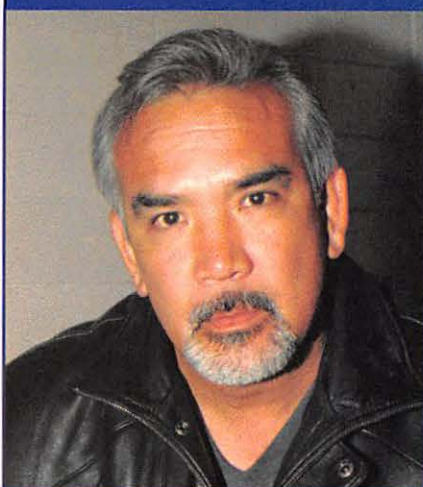
**Q: Tell me about your shop, so our readers will know what you're doing with your life after wrestling.**

**A:** My partner, Dale, and I have our own shop, called R & D Marine,

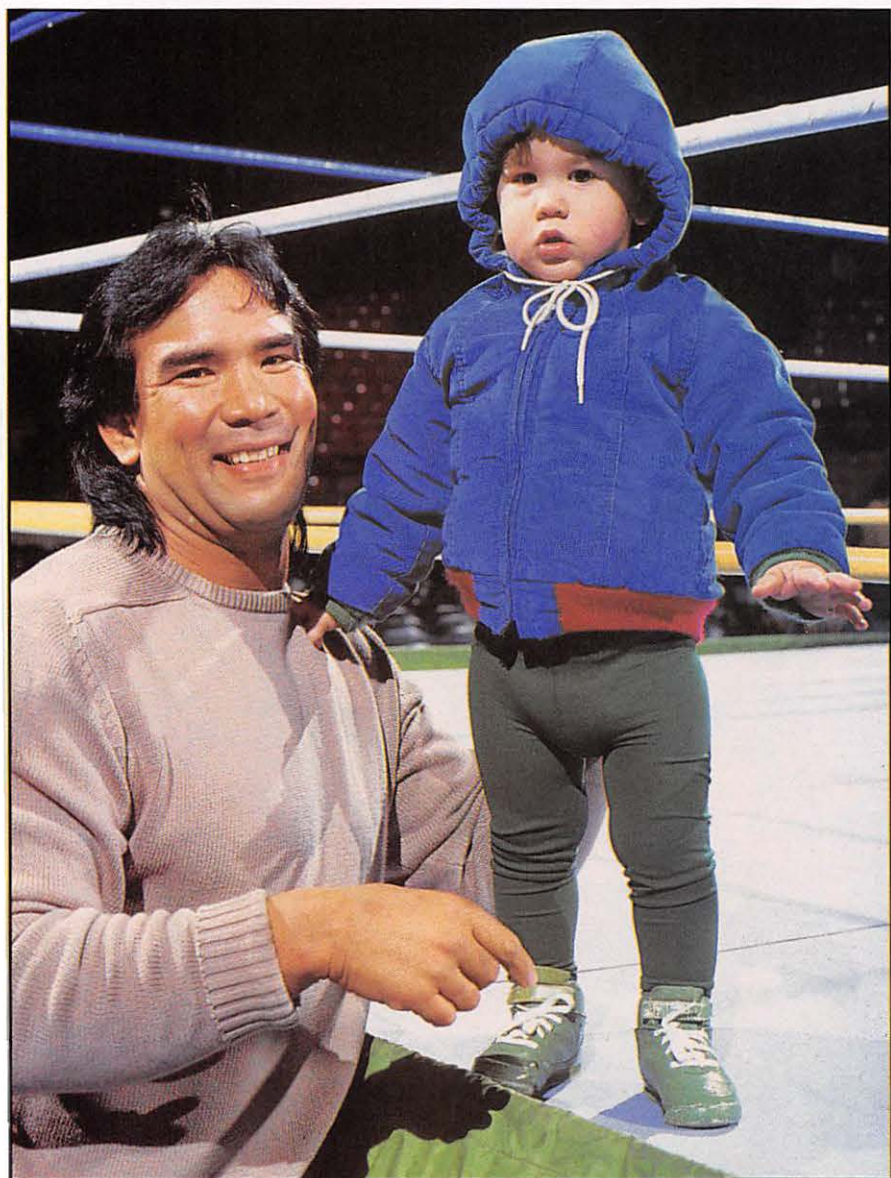
specializing in boats and other watercraft, right here near Lake Norman in Mooresville, North Carolina.

**Q: How many people enter your shop and are surprised to see Rick Steamboat standing there?**

**A:** A lot. In my office, I have a lot of pictures and posters of me from my wrestling days. You see, I'm 51 years old now, my hair is thinning a little and a lot grayer, and I also have a goatee. People will come into my shop and ask for service work, look at the pictures, and then look at me again. They'll say, "You're not Ricky Steamboat, are you? I always watched you as a kid and you were always my fa-



**"I'm glad that I took pride in my craft and worked hard to satisfy the fans. Pro wrestling is an art form, and I'm grateful to have been a part of it."**



So whatever happened to *little* Ricky Steamboat? He's not little anymore. He's 6'2", 200 pounds, and in high school. And he's doing very well as a football player and a race car driver.

vorite!" Then we'll talk about that for 15 minutes, and I'll say, "Okay, so what's wrong with your boat?"

**Q: I think you get that response because you've had such an exceptional career in so many respects. You're remembered as the most consistent fan favorite in recent memory, some would say that Steamboat and Youngblood vs. Slaughter and Kernodle in the steel cage was the greatest tag team match in history, you had wrestling's greatest rivalry with Flair, and you had arguably the best 'Mania match with Savage. I'm sure you hear this all the time. What do you think of this praise?**

**A:** When people tell me this, they have no way of appreciating how much hard work went into it. You can take the easy way out, but you won't make a lasting impact that way. Whether it's a wrestling writer like you or a fan I see on Saturday night who gives me those compliments, I'm glad that I took pride in my craft and worked hard to satisfy the fans. Pro wrestling is an art form, and I'm grateful to have been a part of it. □







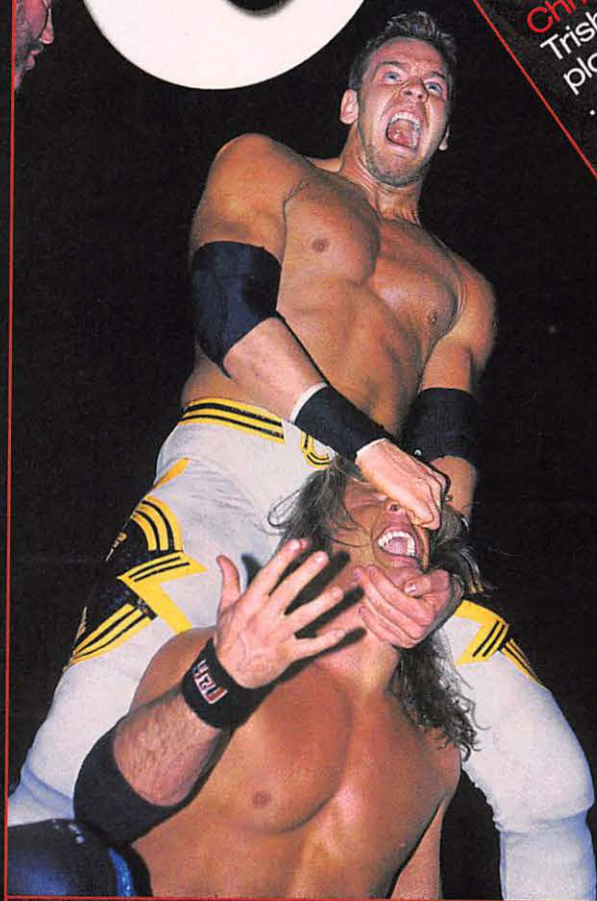
# ENJOY TRISH WHILE YOU CAN, CLB

**She's Going To Make You Sorry You Were Born!**

**Christian** pulled off the coup of a career when he wooed Trish Stratus away from Chris Jericho in an elaborately evil plot that culminated at WrestleMania XX. It was shocking ... it was brilliant ... and it might have been the stupidest thing he ever did

DEAR CHRISTIAN,  
Congratulations on a job well done. Although we don't approve of your methods or the way you normally conduct yourself, we can't help but respect the way you and Trish Stratus plotted Chris Jericho's downfall. We're fans of Jericho here, but even we can admit that he—and we—were had. He truly believed that he had won Trish's heart. He believed in her so much that even though he lost to you at WrestleMania XX, a kiss from her lips is all he would have needed to make things better. Just one sweet, solitary peck is all Jericho would have needed to heal his wounds and make WrestleMania XX one for him to remember for the right reasons.  
He never got that kiss, did he? Trish slapped him hard across the face twice, and while those blows didn't really hurt Jericho, they sure did stun him. They stunned us, too—all of us. There we all were, waiting to see Trish and Jericho officially begin their romance, which had been slowly developing for many months right before our eyes, only to see their whole relationship go awry when Trish

Look at that CLB's face. He's loving every minute of this feud with Chris Jericho. Loving every minute of his time with Trish, too. His career might never be the same after she's through with him. (We don't mean that in a good way, either.)





revealed her startling allegiance to you.

We never saw it coming.

Truth be told, Christian, we were sad, disappointed, and even angry at first. Trish and Chris made a good couple, and we didn't understand what was going on. We wanted answers. However, there was another part of us that enjoyed Trish's little Benedict Arnold act. Those two slaps in the face caught our attention much more than a silly little kiss ever would have.

The unexpected is almost always more entertaining than the expected, isn't it?

Trish is like one of the sirens from ancient Greek mythology. She's calling guys like you and Jericho to her port with her beauty, but unlike Jason and the Argonauts, you don't have Orpheus at your side to help you resist her temptation.

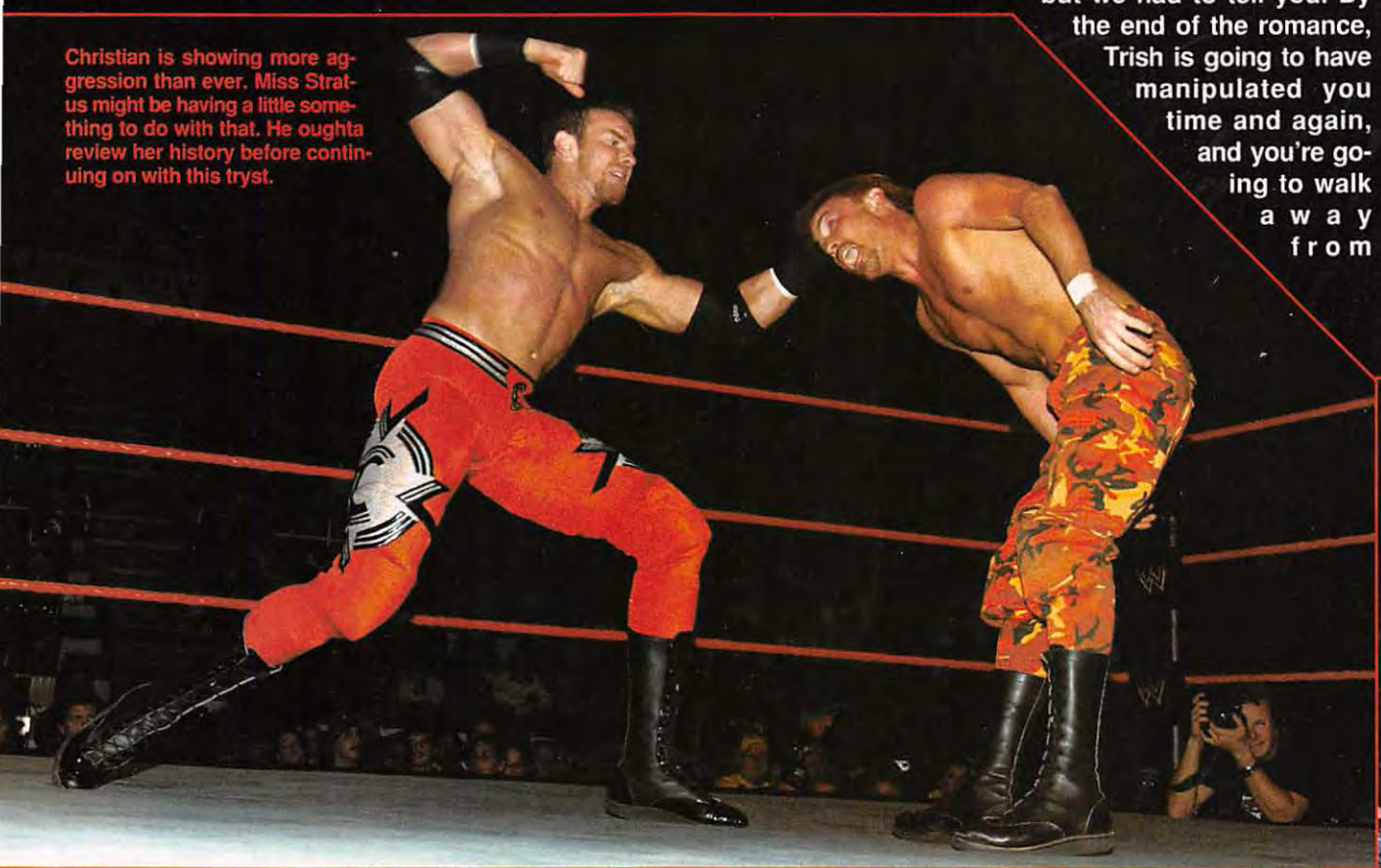
Christian is showing more aggression than ever. Miss Stratus might be having a little something to do with that. He oughta review her history before continuing on with this tryst.

And the sultry kiss that *you* had with Trish atop the WrestleMania XX entranceway—that was the cherry on top of the whipped cream.

Now that the ruse is over, though, Christian, what next? Are you and Trish going to stay together? Plotting against Jericho while sneaking kisses was fun, but how are you going to keep the relationship exciting? Do you think you're going to spite all the fans and live happily ever after? If that's your plan, Christian, please pay attention, because this isn't going to work.

Enjoy Trish while you can, CLB, because she's eventually going to make you sorry that you were ever born!

We know, not what you wanted to hear from us while you're still consumed by the bliss of a new relationship, but we had to tell you. By the end of the romance, Trish is going to have manipulated you time and again, and you're going to walk away from



Then the camera panned to your face, and what a display of raw emotion it provided. You had defeated your arch-enemy on the sport's biggest stage in one of the most creative ways possible, and the big, pie-eating smile that you had on your face was proof of your satisfaction. The months of planning and scheming with Trish, while probably bothersome at times, were worth it because the payoff was so wonderfully rich. When you stepped inside the ring and planted Jericho's face to the mat with an unprettier only seconds after Stratus had humiliated him—that was the whipped cream on top of the hot fudge sundae.

her looking like the biggest fool of all.

You might even wind up looking more foolish than Jericho did at WrestleMania.

We don't doubt that you like her, Christian. We'd certainly fall for a woman so athletic and beautiful. That's the problem, though. Jericho fell for Trish and let her manipulate him, and you're in the same situation. You're caught in her gaze and can't escape. Trish is like one of the sirens from ancient Greek mythology. She's calling guys like you and Jericho to her port with her beauty, but unlike Jason and the Argonauts, you don't have Orpheus at your side to help you resist her temptation.



Despite her demure appearance and past history as a fan favorite, Trish's dark side has been evident throughout her career. Haven't you realized that she's a glory hound? Ever since she debuted in WWE, she's had a pressing need to grab headlines. It's one of the reasons she dislikes Victoria so much: Victoria, out of all the females on WWE's roster, is most capable of stealing Trish's spot. She's just as good in the ring as Trish, and she's equally beautiful, which is why Trish has had it in for her for so long. Trish didn't want the competition, so she played up her sexy side and put Victoria in the position of being the bad girl—and it worked, for a while anyway.

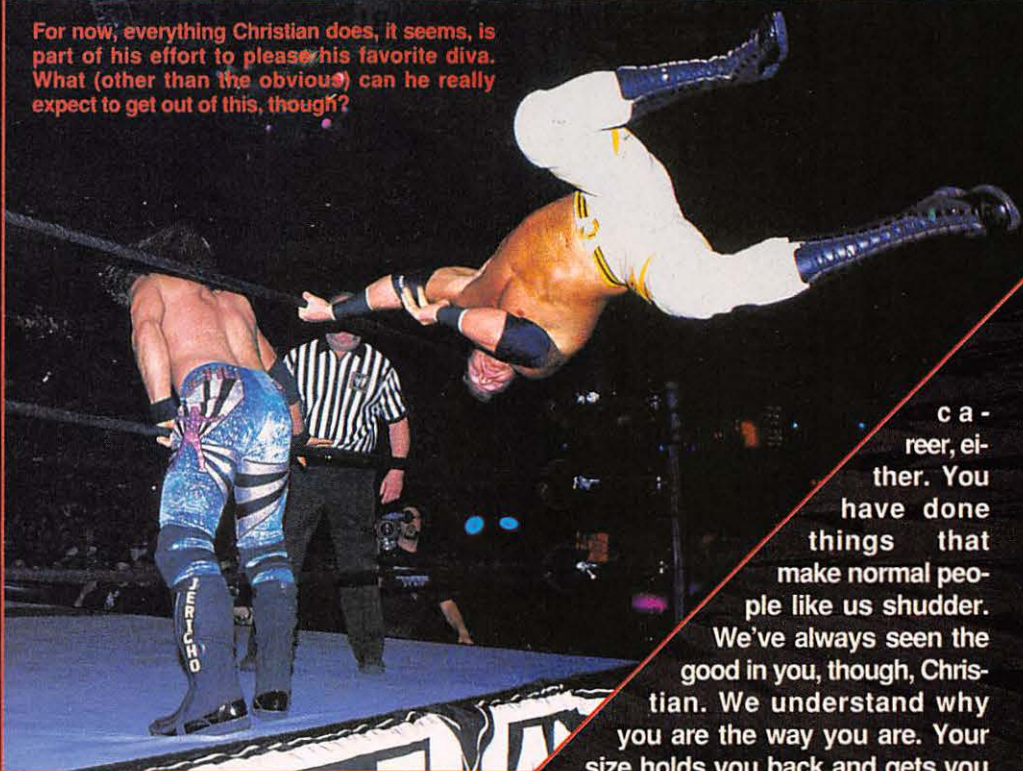
Things are slightly different now, though, aren't they? In spite of Trish's best efforts, you've surely noticed that Victoria is tops in the women's division. It's also interesting to note that as soon as Trish took her

McMahon. She even dated Vince McMahon while his wife, Linda, was in a catatonic state.

And any woman who would form the team of Test and A-Train has to be evil, right?

Of course, we realize that you haven't had a pristine

For now, everything Christian does, it seems, is part of his effort to please his favorite diva. What (other than the obvious) can he really expect to get out of this, though?



career, either. You have done things that make normal people like us shudder. We've always seen the good in you, though, Christian. We understand why you are the way you are. Your size holds you back and gets you lost in the shuffle, so you feel compelled to grab headlines yourself—and, like Trish, you'll often grab them by any means necessary.

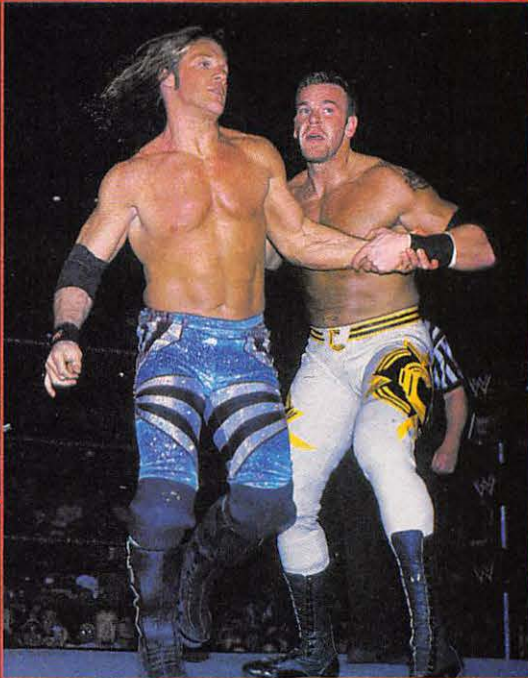
There's another side of you, though, one that we've gotten to enjoy over the years. It's a fun, jocular, and comedic side—and when you're displaying it, your smile is true and honest. That's the Christian we want to see again. That's the Christian we want to cheer again. We'd gladly welcome that Christian back tomorrow, but the longer you stay with Trish, the harder it's going to be for you to rediscover that side of yourself. The longer you stay with her, the harder it's going to be for you when she breaks your heart.

And she *will* break your heart, Christian.

Face it: Trish has the power to do what no other WWE wrestler can do. She has the power to crush you—not from the outside, but from the inside. Get out now while you still have a chance, because if you wait too long and she acts first, nothing you do will make things better. □



Those two slaps Y2J took from Trish at 'Mania stung (above). And Christian wants to hurt him more (right). However, we think she'll sting him as much as she stung Jericho—perhaps more—before this sordid affair ends.



hiatus from the division, Victoria suddenly became a fan favorite.

These aren't coincidences, Christian.

Delve deeper into Trish's past. You'll find even more proof of her conniving ways. If you remember, she got caught in between Triple-H and Stephanie






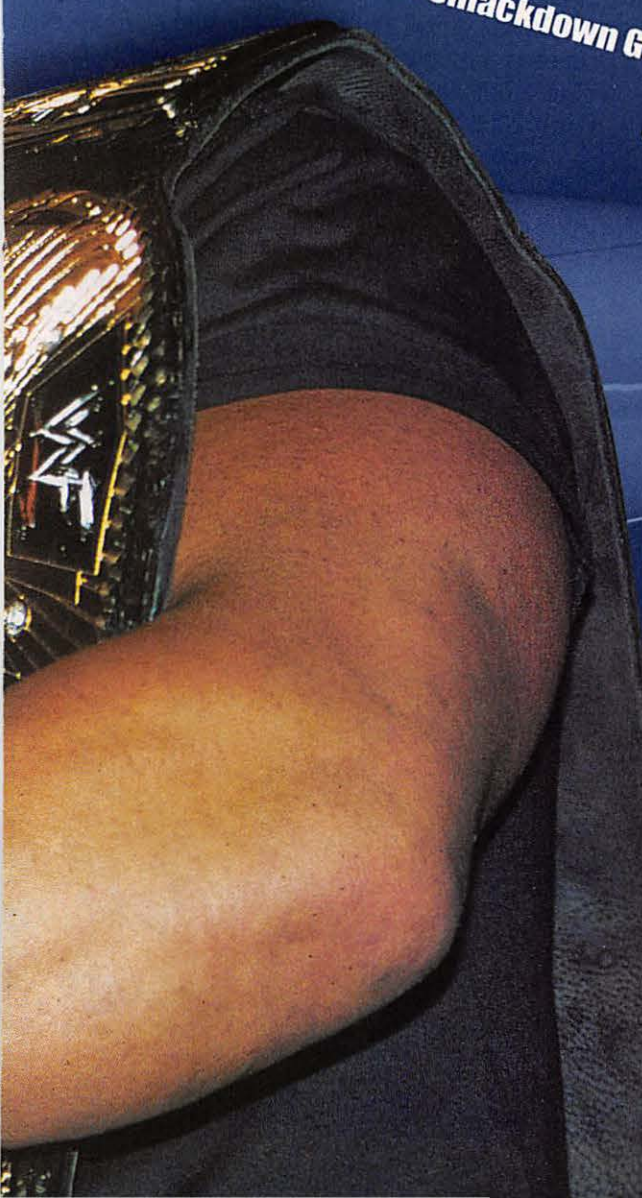
# THE BILLION-DOLLAR REASON TRIPLE-H



Triple-H went right after Eddie Guerrero on March 22, as if he really wanted that Smackdown title that Eddie held. Our sources indicate that the Smackdown superstars really wanted no part of him on their roster.

A photograph of Triple H pinning Eddie Guerrero in a wrestling ring. Triple H is on top, leaning over Guerrero, who is on his back. A referee in a blue shirt stands in the background. The ring has red ropes.

# WAS TRADED BACK TO RAW!

A close-up photograph of a WWE championship belt, showing the gold plates and the black strap.

Were you stunned to see Smackdown GM Kurt Angle trade the biggest name on the WWE roster back to Raw within hours of drafting him? The superstars of Smackdown were not. They forced the Triple-H deal because they feared the start of a second McMahon-Helmsley Era

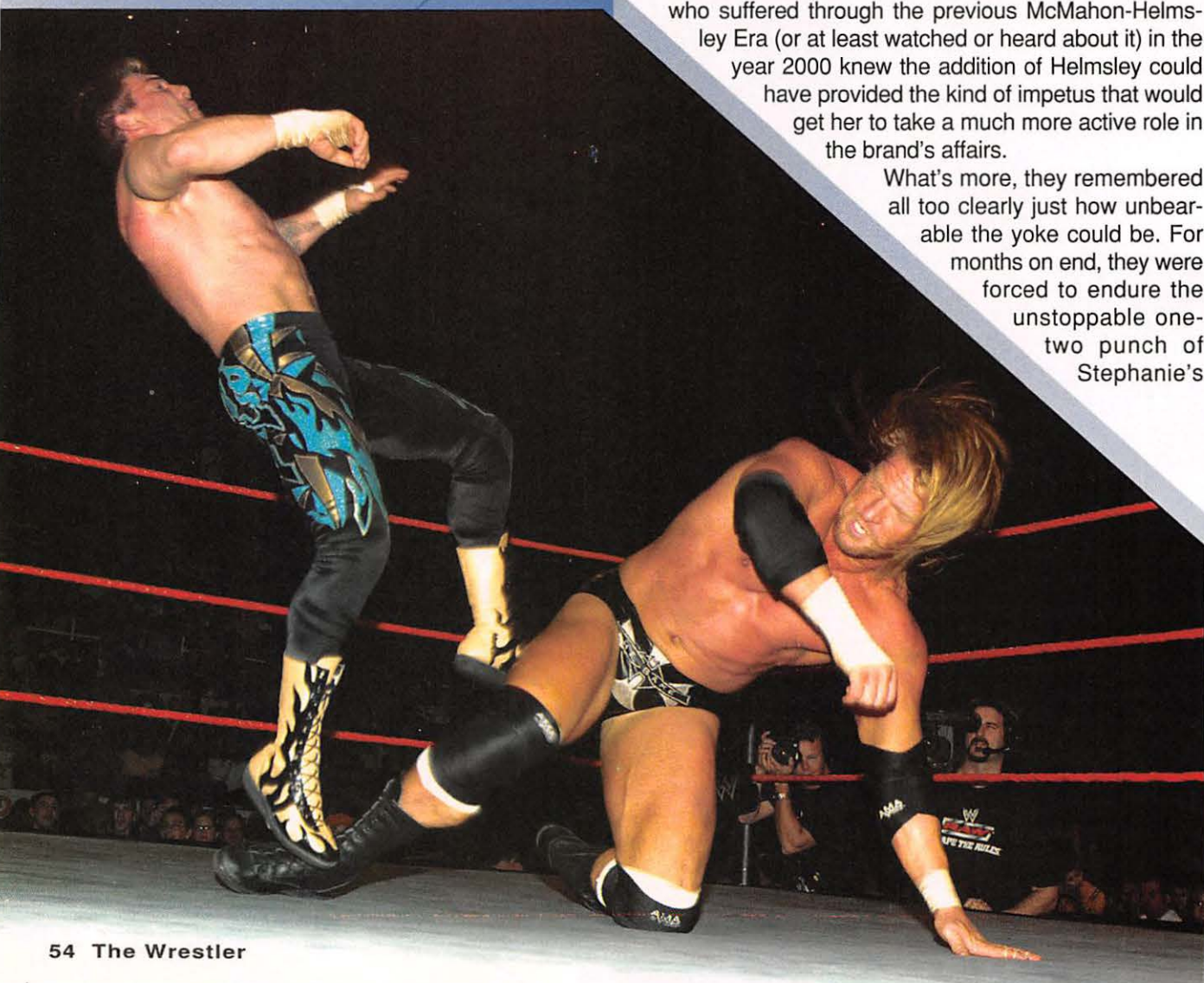
**By Frank Krewda**

**T**HE RAW CAMERA people did a great job capturing backstage reaction to the WWE lottery draft picks on March 22. Unfortunately, they missed the most telling shot of the night. More colorful than Paul Heyman's face when Eric Bischoff selected him for service in Raw, more emotional than





"The Game" got caught using the ropes for leverage as he applied an abdominal stretch (above), but he used his powerful knee to send Guerrero reeling without cheating (below). We wonder if Stephanie was watching very closely from somewhere.



Charlie Haas' reaction upon hearing his long-time friend and tag team partner, Shelton Benjamin, was being shipped off to Raw, more shocking than the Raw contingent's impromptu chorus of "Kiss Him Goodbye" was the negative reaction among the Smackdown wrestlers when the HHH pick was announced.

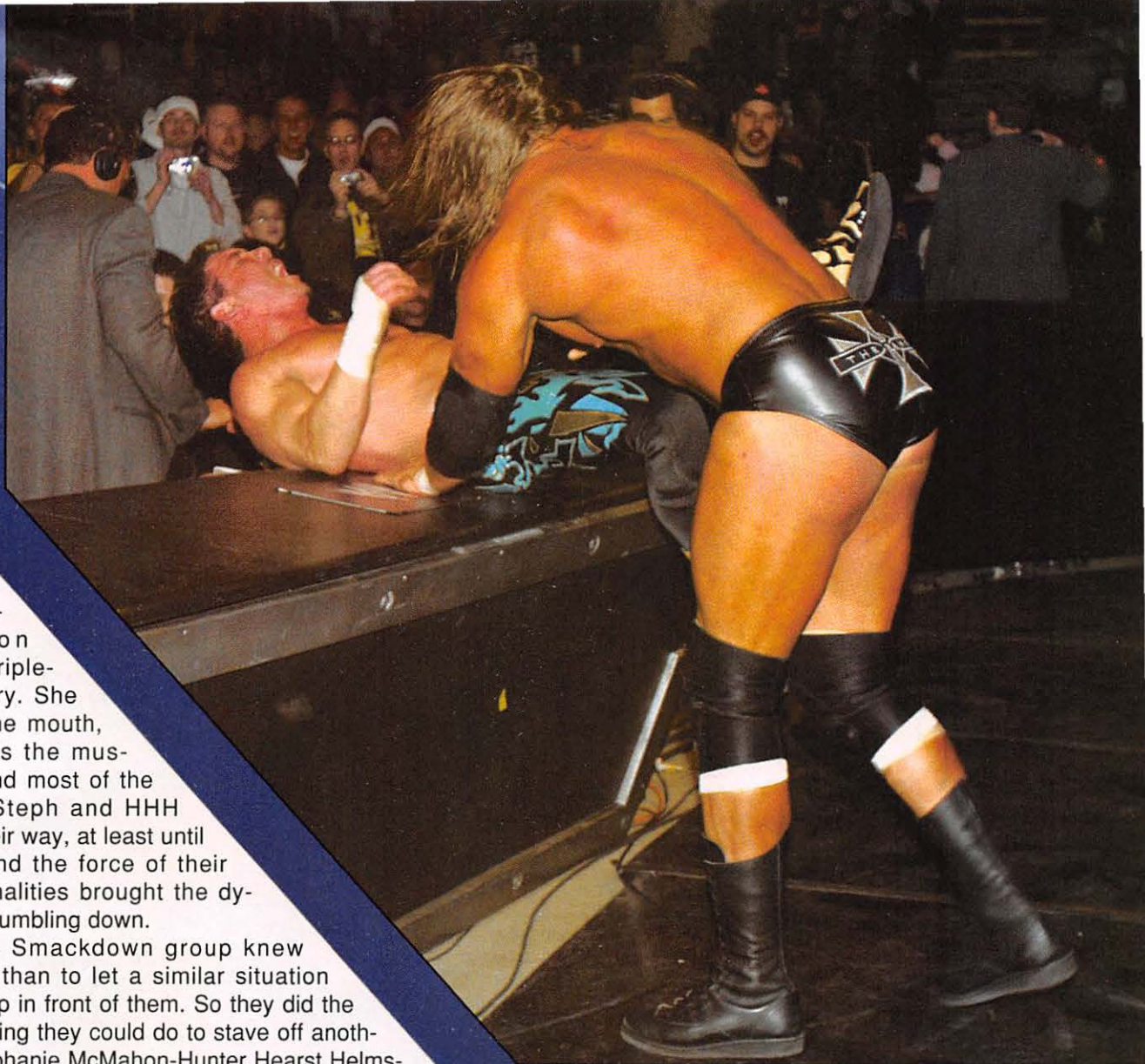
There's no doubt among members of the Smackdown group that adding a wrestler of Triple-H's ability and clout would represent a boon to their brand. After all, Helmsley's high-profile villainous presence could have generated some interesting feuds with fan favorites such as Eddie Guerrero (*see sidebar*), John Cena, and perhaps The Undertaker.

But how long would it take before Triple-H made it his business to somehow and some way get his wife, "The Billion-Dollar Princess" Stephanie McMahon-Helmsley, back into the Smackdown ring—a place neither the fans nor the WWE Smackdown superstars seemingly want her to be. Probably not long at all. As a Smackdown newcomer, Triple-H would have had a definite need to surround himself with people of influence and accomplishment right away. Who can he trust if not his wife?

Granted, Steph has (surprisingly) stayed behind the scenes since Vince choked her out in an "I Quit" match last October at No Mercy. But apparently, some wrestlers who suffered through the previous McMahon-Helmsley Era (or at least watched or heard about it) in the year 2000 knew the addition of Helmsley could have provided the kind of impetus that would get her to take a much more active role in the brand's affairs.

What's more, they remembered all too clearly just how unbearable the yoke could be. For months on end, they were forced to endure the unstoppable one-two punch of Stephanie's





Guerrero takes a beating on the announcers' table, courtesy of Mr. Helmsley. Soon, reinforcements from both sides of WWE would arrive, some with a more specific mission than others.

manipulation and Triple-H's fury. She was the mouth, he was the muscle, and most of the time Steph and HHH got their way, at least until ego and the force of their personalities brought the dynasty tumbling down.

The Smackdown group knew better than to let a similar situation develop in front of them. So they did the only thing they could do to stave off another Stephanie McMahon-Hunter Hearst Helmsley power play: They pressured newly nominated Smackdown General Manager Kurt Angle to trade Helmsley back to Raw in exchange for Booker T and The Dudley Boyz. To them, Steph + Triple-H = Big Problems.

Few WWE insiders know better than Angle just how "complicated" Stephanie can make life for her enemies. Early in their careers, she routinely pitted a smitten

Angle against Triple-H to stoke his jealousy and competitive drive. At times, she

**The Smackdown group did the only thing they could do to stave off another Stephanie McMahon-Hunter Hearst Helmsley power play: They pressured newly nominated Smackdown General Manager Kurt Angle to trade Helmsley back to Raw in exchange for Booker T and The Dudley Boyz. To them, Steph + Triple-H = Big Problems.**

feigned affection for Angle and willingly put herself in ominous positions, sometimes during key matches, knowing Angle's gentlemanly instincts to save or protect her would cost him the match. It was a lesson you'd think that Angle wouldn't have forgotten, but he's sticking to his story that he made the deal for much more obvious reasons.

"Sure, in a way it was tough sending Triple-H back to Raw," insisted Angle. "Regardless of what's happened between the two of us over the years, I recognize that he's a great talent. But I just believe that we got three quality wrestlers in exchange for one. I loved the deal when I made it, and I still love it now. That's all there was to it."

Not from what we've been told. Numerous Smackdown wrestlers told THE WRESTLER on condition of anonymity that Angle simply caved under the enormous pressure and is trying to put a positive spin on the situation.



# BUT WHAT IF HUNTER WON THE SMACKDOWN TITLE?

For some of the members of Smackdown who brawled with their Raw counterparts during the Eddie Guerrero-Triple-H main event Smackdown title match on *Raw* on March 22, there was more than brand pride on the line. These men were fighting for their careers. That's how strongly some of them opposed the addition of Triple-H to the Smackdown roster.

So when Ric Flair and Batista came to ringside to tilt the odds in "The Game's" favor, a Smackdown presence at ringside was commanded. "We knew things would get wack," said U.S. heavyweight champion John Cena. "So it was like, 'Let's rush these punks.' Then it was on."

For the wrestlers who've dealt with Stephanie and Hunter in the past, and those who follow Raw, keeping Triple-H from winning the Smackdown title became priority number one. A plan to force a Triple-H trade was already in the works. They were convinced that having Triple-H around would all but guarantee Stephanie's return to a Smackdown ring. Maybe a reunion with Vince would have followed.

So it was out of no particular sense of loyalty to Guerrero that his Smackdown compatriots stormed the ringside area to thwart any attempt by the Raw superstars to interfere on HHH's behalf.

Even Eddie understood that had Triple-H defeated him for the belt, he'd have been mandated to at least defend the title on a Smackdown show. Then all the pressure put on GM Kurt Angle by the Smackdown wrestlers to trade Helmsley back to Raw would have been moot, because HHH would have been contractu-

ally bound to perform on their cards.

Ultimately, the match was given to "Latino Heat" on a disqualification when the ringside brawling started by members of Evolution interfered with the bout, a development HHH is convinced benefited Guerrero. "I was beating Guerrero like a pinata, but he found a way to keep his belt. Good for him," he said.

As far as what motivated the Smackdown wrestlers to get involved, Triple-H said, "You're telling me they didn't want the best wrestler in the world to represent their brand? To hell with them. Let them keep Booker T and The Dudley Boyz. That belt Chris Benoit is wearing will be back around my waist soon enough anyway."

—Frank Krewda

HHH could have had a new belt to wear!



"The backlash from our guys was incredible," said one superstar. "I know Booker hasn't exactly warmed up to the trade just yet. But I'd rather have one unhappy wrestler around here than an entire roster full of malcontents. Besides, the guys are right. Who needs Stephanie complicating things? She's not bad on her own, but put the two of them together and you're asking for a disaster. And you know it would have happened."

"Yeah, Steph taught me some hard lessons," countered Angle. "That was a long time ago. Personally, I have nothing against her, or Hunter, for that matter. I have no idea where these rumors came from. But as the new GM, I have to do what's best for the Smackdown brand. I think the Smackdown brand will be better served by Booker and the Dudleys."

Spoken like a true bureaucrat. Obviously, Angle gave the trade considerable forethought. But what he couldn't have gambled on was Booker's lack of enthu-

siasm for appearing on Smackdown. Since joining the blue shirts, Booker has gone out of his way to run down the Smackdown brand, its fans, and several superstars, including heavyweight champ Guerrero.

Despite Booker's misgivings, Angle argues that he



made the right choice. "Look, after just one week, Booker's in main event matches battling for the [Smackdown] title. That's a lot more than he was doing on Raw. And if we're really the minor leagues, like he says we are, then he's got an opportunity to change that perception. He can take Smackdown on his shoulders and carry it to new heights."

Other Smackdown performers might not share their GM's optimism, but they would probably much rather suffer a few insults from Booker T than contend with the more dangerous and influential Triple-H. The combination of his natural skills, a pipeline to WWE decision-makers, and having Steph run interference for him once more, would make Helmsley nearly omnipotent. And that says nothing for HHH's uncanny ability to surround himself with the company's marquee superstars in supergroups.

Ask Mick Foley or Steve Austin or The Rock just how unnerving it can be to do battle with DeGeneration X or Evolution. All three men spent months at war with Helmsley—and whomever he enlisted at the time to protect him. Merely dealing with HHH also takes a mental toll. Triple-H refers to himself as "The Cerebral Assassin" and for good reason: He's equally adept at breaking down mentally or physically anyone who stands in his way.

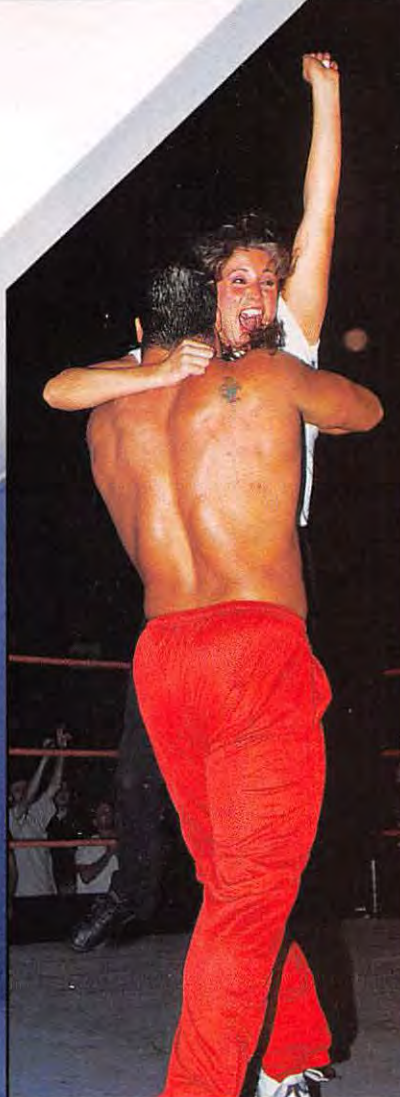
For example, even after being defeated twice by Chris Benoit and Benjamin, Helmsley, with the aid of Ric Flair, is undertaking a campaign to rewrite history by publicly brushing off the losses as flukes, insisting they really don't even count in the grand scheme of things.

Even Shawn Michaels, who helped groom Triple-H into the confident performer he is today, found himself on the business end of HHH's mind games not too long ago. "Triple-H tried to convince me that I was broken down and past my prime and couldn't get it done anymore," he said. "And you know what: He almost did. You gotta be on your toes around him because the wheels are always turning. I guess I can't blame the Smackdown guys for shipping him back here. Sounds like there could be something to that story."

Michaels, like Benoit and Benjamin, can extract one positive from the trade, however: They appreciate an opportunity to compete against the best. While Michaels continues to battle his former protege in peripheral skirmishes, Benoit and Benjamin have challenged and defeated Triple-H. Those are victories that will only enhance their careers.

"What can I say?" Benjamin asked. "Without Triple-H, this whole trade isn't as meaningful for me. I was lucky enough to beat maybe the best wrestler in the world on my first chance, and that's definitely given me confidence as well as some fame. It sounds strange, but I owe him quite a lot."

If Kurt Angle and the Smackdown cast have their way, Triple-H will have plenty of time on Raw to exact payment for the favor. □



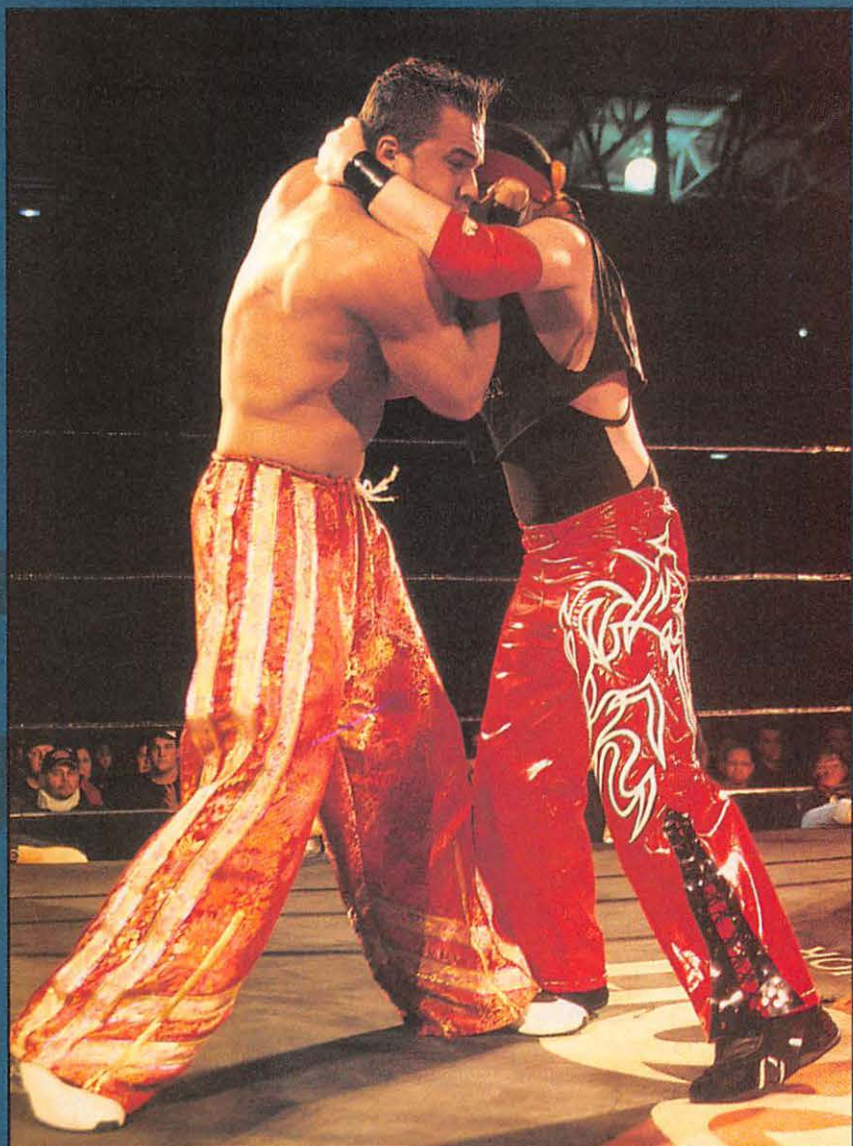
Smackdown GM Kurt Angle was once quite tight with Stephanie McMahon (left). He also incurred the wrath of her husband on many an occasion (below). Still, he says he traded Triple-H only because he thought it was a good deal for his brand. Sorry, but we're not buying that.





# HONOR

**A sex scandal involving the promoter very nearly destroyed the credibility of one of the hottest and most beloved indy promotions in the U.S. On the first card after the Rob Feinstein story broke, more than 1,800 fans showed up to support Ring of Honor. The result was an unforgettable night**



Photos by George Tahinos

The Amazing Red got to lock up with the controversial Teddy Hart after missing the better part of a year with a knee injury. And what a show to make his Ring of Honor return!



# IN THE RING

## Fans Send An Inspirational Message To ROH

By Dan Murphy

**I**T HAD ALL the potential to be a disaster.

Ring of Honor promoter Rob Feinstein was one of three men implicated in an Internet sex sting orchestrated by a Philadelphia TV station after he allegedly made overtures of a sexual nature to an investigator posing online as a 14-year-old boy and then set up a meeting with him. The scandal—which has yet to result in any criminal charges being filed—threatened to damage Ring of Honor's reputation and credibility, as well as the reputation of all the wrestlers and staff associated with the promotion.

"Rowdy" Roddy Piper canceled his upcoming booking with the company. Online fans threatened to boycott ROH, fearing that the paychecks Feinstein drew from ROH might have enabled him to prey on children, thereby holding ROH partially responsible for Feinstein's actions. ROH headliners Samoa Joe, Low-Ki, and Christopher Daniels were quick to issue statements distancing themselves from Feinstein, and despite the fact that Feinstein is no longer affiliated with the company, Ring of Honor's very future was in doubt.

The scandal broke as ROH promoters were planning a major card in Elizabeth, New Jersey, on WrestleMania weekend. Management was hearing rumors that protesters would picket the Rex Plex, and no one knew how the fans in attendance would react, or if the scandal would keep even the staunchest ROH fans away.

Some of the harsher critics declared the scandal would kill Ring of Honor.

Instead, the March 13 card was an unqualified success, drawing more than 1,800 rabid fans and proving that people haven't turned their backs on the promotion that emphasizes traditional wrestling over sports entertainment.

"It was a very emotional night for the locker room," said ROH head booker Gabe Sapolsky. "We knew we had to deliver an extra special show and we did."

ROH rebounded from Piper's cancellation by signing "The American Dream" Dusty Rhodes to make a guest appearance. Rhodes was a public relations god-send, a symbolic show of support from the traditionalists. He signed autographs, got into an altercation with old-time villain Ox Baker, and cut an entertaining promo to get the show kicked off on a positive note.

The Amazing Red returned from knee surgery and defeated Mark Briscoe,





It didn't take long for former ROH champ Xavier to put away Slyk Wagner Brown ... and start thinking about the rematch for that ROH title that he has yet to receive.

Sonjay Dutt, Jack Evans, Jimmy Rave, and Teddy Hart in a six-way mayhem match. Fans were pumped to see one of wrestling's most popular high-flyers (Red) and perhaps the most controversial star on the independent scene (Hart) together in one match, and the high spot-filled opener set the tone for the rest of the night.

Former ROH champ Xavier made quick work of Slyk Wagner Brown in the second match and then issued a challenge to current champion Samoa Joe, noting he had yet to receive a rematch for the title that he lost a year earlier. That prompted Joe to make his way to ringside for a staredown with Xavier.

The ever-popular team of Dunn and Marcos kept the good times rolling by punking out The Solution, and former ECW champion Jerry Lynn beat Nigel McGuinness to earn a shot at the pure wrestling championship. In a match that thrilled the hardcore mat wrestling fans in attendance, Matt Stryker beat John Walters with the Stryker lock to take the number-one contender's trophy. That technical tour de force

was followed by a wild brawl between Danny Maff and B.J. Whitmer that ended in a no-contest.

There was no mistaking it: The atmosphere inside the Rex Plex was electric. There were no picketers outside, no derogatory chants or signs. The fans just wanted to be entertained by fine wrestling, and the entire ROH crew was jacked to deliver.

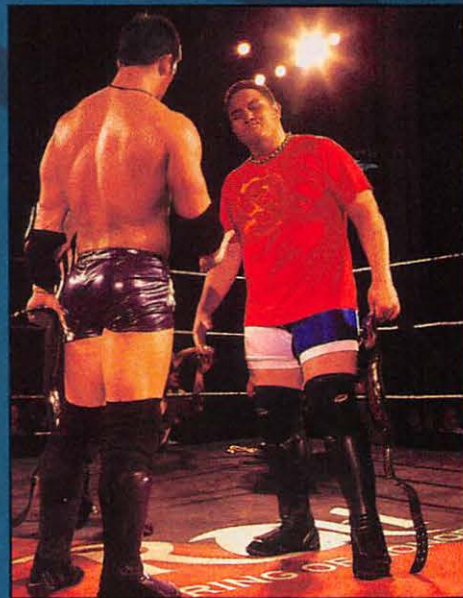


Jerry Lynn had his hands full with British export Nigel McGuinness in a match that he won to earn a shot at the pure wrestling gold.

Adding even more excitement to one of the night's most highly anticipated matches, Rick Steamboat was named special referee for the pure wrestling championship bout between A.J. Styles and C.M. Punk. In the unique rules of the match, Styles exhausted his three rope breaks early in the match and Punk tortured him



A.J. Styles was at his pure wrestling best in defending the ROH title of that name against C.M. Punk (above). By the end of the night, Styles had issues with ROH titleholder Samoa Joe as well (right).





**"There was no mistaking it: The atmosphere inside the Rex Plex was electric. There were no picketers outside, no derogatory chants or signs. The fans just wanted to be entertained by fine wrestling, and the entire ROH crew was jacked to deliver."**

with submission holds, forcing Styles to either find counters or submit. Styles managed to triumph over adversity to score the win. When Punk fumed that Steamboat missed seeing Styles drop his arm three times while trapped in a sleeper, "The Dragon" nailed Punk with a brutal chop, arm-dragged him to the mat, and floored him with a karate chop. The fans rewarded Steamboat with a standing ovation.

With the clean-cut grappling out of the way, it was time to get extreme. Samoa Joe put the ROH title on the line against Jay Briscoe in a steel cage match. Briscoe was busted open early, and his brother, Mark, tried to help him escape from the cage and steal the win. Styles, however, ward off Mark, allowing Joe to nail Jay with a musclebuster off the top rope for the win. After the match, Joe accidentally kicked the cage door into Styles' face, precipitating an argument between the ROH champ and the pure wrestling titleholder.

The main event was the highly anticipated "Scramble Cage II," pitting The Carnage Crew (H.C. Loc, Devito, Justin Credible, and Masada) against Special K. The action was wild and crazy, with Izzy and Masada battling on top of a ladder perched atop the cage. Even Rhodes and Baker got involved. The jaw-dropping finish saw Devito and Loc hit a spike piledriver on Angeldust off the top of the cage and through two tables, giving the win to the Crew.

It was a perfect way to cap off an unbelievable night

for a promotion that had no idea what to expect from this night in Elizabeth.

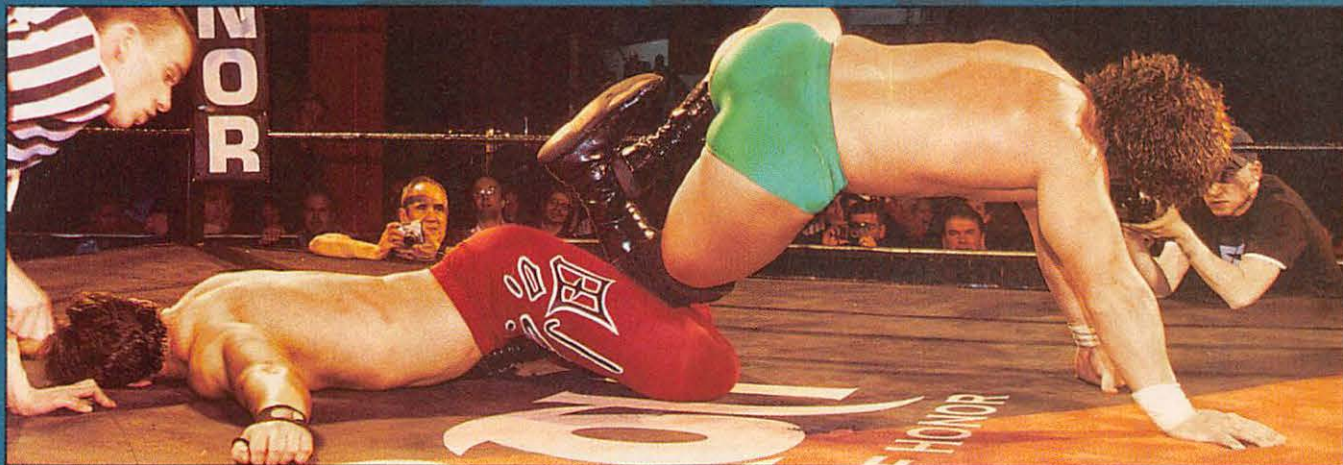
"This will definitely go down as one of my favorite shows in Ring of Honor history," Sapolsky said after the card. "It had something for everyone. We had one of the greatest and bloodiest steel cage matches ever with Samoa Joe vs. Jay Briscoe, the match of pure insanity with the 'Scramble' cage, legends like Dusty



Mark Briscoe more than held his own during a six-way match also involving, among four others, Jimmy Rave. He didn't fare so well in his efforts to help brother Jay unseat Samoa Joe as ROH champ.

and Steamboat, classic wrestling under our own unique rules with A.J. Styles and C.M. Punk, a wild brawl with The Prophecy vs. The Second City Saints, and just overall great action. This was one of our most well-rounded cards, and everyone left their hearts and souls in that ring.

"Our fans are the greatest fans I've ever come across," he continued. "They want to see the best wrestling, and we strive to give that to them. Without our fans, we wouldn't be here." □



There were no derogatory chants or protesters to worry about as Matt Stryker forced John Walters to tap out to his Stryker lock. In fact, there were no derogatory chants or protests to worry about at all.





# The Brawl That

LOYALTY LIES IN  
THE COLOR OF A T-SHIRT



Heck, Steve Austin isn't even a wrestler anymore, but he's the sheriff of Raw, and it's not like he needs a reason to join a fight, especially with someone in a blue T-shirt.

Photos by Claus Andersen







# Restarted It All

Who knew that such animosity existed between the two sides of WWE? It wasn't until all-out war broke out one night in March that we discovered that WWE superstars really do pledge their allegiance to their brands

By Jason Langin

**W**HY WOULD SHAWN MICHAELS attack Scotty Too Hotty? Maybe the two bumped shoulders as part of an interbrand match somewhere, but no, they didn't. This brawl took place on *Raw*, and the fight had nothing to do with a rivalry between the two stars. According to backstage scuttlebutt, you'd have a hard time finding two more personable guys in WWE than Michaels and Scotty. For the two of them to fight seemed really bizarre. But on the night of the WWE draft lottery, bizarre was the name of the game.

"I just started swinging at the first guy I saw in a blue shirt," Michaels said after the locker room-clearing brawl that closed *Raw* on March 22. "Nothing against Scotty. He's a good guy. I just wanted to be sure our team came out on top."

**Team?** Other than tag teams, since when are there teams in wrestling?

For one night in WWE, there was. That March 22 *Raw* had the feel of an NBA or NHL All-Star Game, with two teams fighting for supremacy—the red shirts of *Raw* and the blue boys (and girls) of Smackdown.

Nobody, from the wrestlers to the fans, knew what to expect when the two bingo drums were rolled out onto the platform in front of the TitanTron. But when Paul Heyman pulled the first ball, things got interesting.

Some stars were happy to be drafted. A few were irate. Others still were traded one night later. One was drafted and then traded back. And no sooner had wrestlers switched T-shirts than they had completely switched allegiance.

Spike Dudley, who was drafted by Smackdown, said the following: "It's like getting traded in any sport. You have to let your past be your past. You want your new team to know you're on board with them right away."

But why? Wouldn't these wrestlers only be competing against others on their own rosters on the very next night?

"I know it doesn't make any sense," *Raw*'s Chris Jericho said with a laugh. "It's kind of like a brawl in a baseball game where the relief pitchers come charging out of the bullpen. They have nothing to do with the action, but they just need to get involved."

"It was really a no-win situation," said Smack-







Kane, who just loves the color red, couldn't resist taking a poke at a blue T-shirt-wearing A-Train. Little did he know that soon Train would be a member of the Raw roster.

down's Billy Kidman. "If you didn't go out there, you'd lose the respect of your locker room. And then if you did go out there, you could have gotten your head busted. Some choice."

When the wreckage was finally cleared, wrestlers everywhere were fired up, but many of them were wearing smiles on their faces.

"It got my blood pumping," said Smackdown's John Cena. "Poppin' off on the Raw punks. This is Smackdown's house, baby. Ain't no room for weak chumps."

So maybe there was a point to the brawl after all. It wasn't to settle scores or determine championship rankings. It was to stoke the fires of every superstar. Vince McMahon wanted to shake things up in WWE and he accomplished his goal.

Here's the rundown of the draft results and our assessment of which stars made out best in each deal:

**Rene Dupree.** Good pick for Smackdown and for Dupree. La Resistance was languishing in the tag team ranks. Plus, with the return of Sylvan Grenier, what more could Dupree accomplish? The youngest tag team champion in WWE history will get a chance to prove himself on Smackdown (he scored a big debut win over Billy Kidman).

**Shelton Benjamin.** Arguably the best pick of the night. After an impressive run in the gauntlet series in his last *Smackdown* appearance, Benjamin

seemed primed for a serious run as a singles competitor. In his first appearance on *Raw*, Benjamin scored an upset pinfall victory over Triple H, and then beat him by countout again a week later.

**Mark Jindrak.** Bad for Jindrak. Jindrak had been competing in a tag team with Garrison Cade, a duo that seemed on the brink of championship success. This was certainly not a pick that sent shockwaves through the Smackdown roster, as Jindrak didn't even appear on the next *Smackdown* broadcast.

**Nidia.** Great pick for Raw, great opportunity for Nidia. Without a women's championship on Smackdown, what point was there for Nidia to wrestle? With Raw, the first *Tough Enough* champion will get to compete for gold. In her first *Raw* appearance, Nidia upset former women's champion Molly Holly, solidifying her spot as a major player.

**Triple-H.** After being drafted by Smackdown, Helmsley was dealt back to Raw in a trade for three superstars (Booker T and The Dudley Boyz). Obviously it was a good deal for Smackdown, but was it good for Raw? No, for two reasons. First, WWE missed out on a chance to really shake up

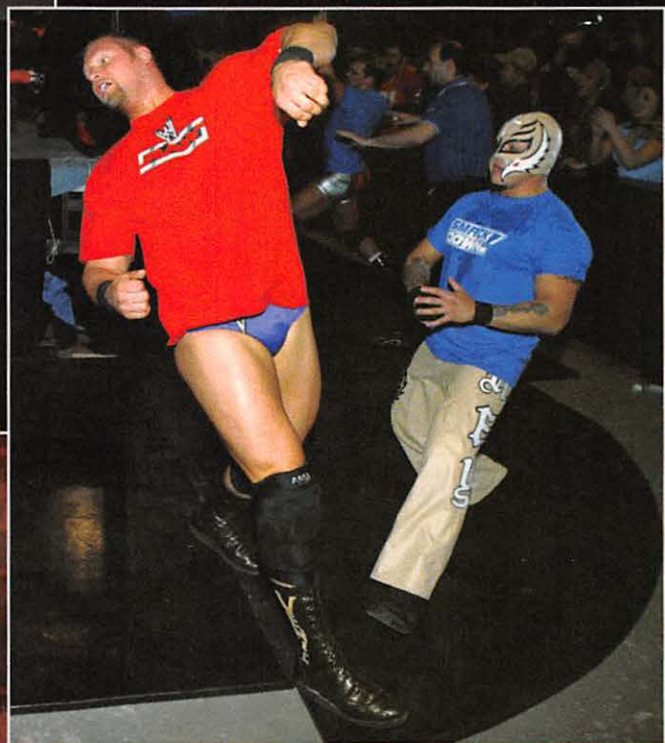
both sides. Triple-H on Smackdown would have drastically changed the mood in both locker rooms, but it was not to be. Also, Triple-H learned just how the other Raw wrestlers felt about him when his name was pulled from the drum. He will



Kane also saw red when he saw The Big Show in blue. Even a man as unstable as "The Big Red Machine" is willing to fight on behalf of his brand.



Raw champion Chris Benoit had no issues with (Smackdown) cruiserweight champ Chavo Guerrero Jr. (left), but so what! And even though Rey Misterio Jr. is his arch-rival, Chavito had to love seeing him get the best of Raw's Val Venis (below).



be sure to take out his frustrations on some of them soon.

**Rhyno.** Neither good nor bad for Rhyno or Raw. The last ECW champion got a chance to wrestle Chris Benoit for the Raw championship on his first night with the red team, but it might have been his only chance. Rhyno was languishing on the Smackdown roster, and despite his obvious excitement at being drafted, he is in danger of doing the same with Raw.

**Rob Van Dam.** Great pick for Smackdown and RVD. Fans knew there was no way Van Dam would climb to the top of the Raw mountain. Van Dam was stunned to learn he was drafted by Smackdown just moments after he and Booker T lost their Raw tag championship to Ric Flair and Batista. Still, in his first Smackdown appearance, Van Dam expressed his excitement over being drafted and pinned Charlie Haas. In the more athletic atmosphere of Smackdown, Van Dam should be able to really show off his skills. Might he renew his classic rivalry with Eddie Guerrero?

**Tajiri.** "The Japanese Buzzsaw" loses on a number of fronts. Most importantly, he loses the chance to compete for the cruiserweight championship. Secondly, he has been separated from his buddies Akio and Sakoda. And based on his first appearance on *Raw* (in which he was tricked into spraying Jonathan Coachman with green mist), Tajiri could be relegated to comedic skits.

**Theodore Long.** A waste of a pick. *Be-lee dat, playa!* Raw got lucky.

**Edge.** Great pick for Raw, not necessarily a crippling loss for Smackdown. Raw needed another major star and Edge is that man. Edge hadn't appeared on a Smackdown show for more than a year and the brand has gotten by without him.

**Spike Dudley.** The best thing to happen to the

runt of the Dudley litter in a long time. Spike was often forced to wrestle monsters like Kane with Raw. On the blue team, he can compete for the cruiserweight title, which he almost won from Chavo Guerrero Jr. in his first appearance.

**Paul Heyman.** Good pick for Raw in the short term. Immediately after being selected, Heyman quit, leaving a void in the Smackdown GM position. For Eric Bischoff, this had to be considered a victory. Heyman had been producing some great *Smackdown* broadcasts, making him a viable opponent in the intrapromotional war. Although Kurt Angle is now the GM of Smackdown, it remains to be seen if the Olympic hero can deliver in the boardroom as well as he did in the ring.

The next day's trades were eventful as well. Raw regained the services of Helmsley and acquired A-Train and Chuck Palumbo. Kurt Angle did a nice job dealing for Booker T and the Dudleys, not to mention Rico and Jackie Gayda. So the next few months will provide us with new matches and rivalries. We may not see an interpromotional brawl again for a while, which is okay. But there is little doubt that it left an impression on those involved. "I don't think anybody in either locker room will ever look at Raw vs. Smackdown the same way," noted Jericho. "Maybe we were set up to be put in a position where we'd come to blows, but, ya know, it felt good while it lasted." □



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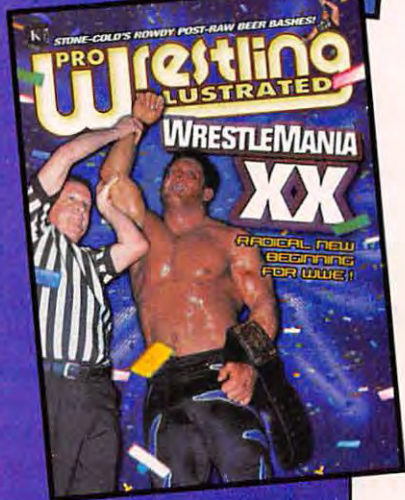
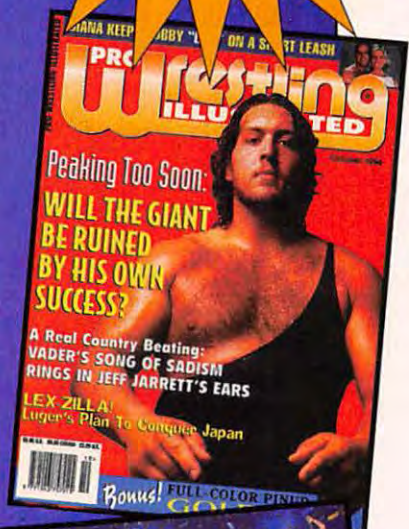
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**THE WRESTLER Exclusive:**

# TWO VIEWS OF THE BIGGEST IN THE



ECWA promoter Jim Kettner surprised a lot of people by choosing an internationally known star in Nicho—formerly known as Psicosis—as one of the eight participants in this year's Super 8

Tournament. What did participating in such a tournament mean to a man who has been a star in ECW, WCW, and his native Mexico? As he explains, more than you could imagine

## By Nicho

**I** CAN ALWAYS tell how big a wrestling card is by the atmosphere in the locker room in the hours before the opening bell.

The size of the building and the number of fans in attendance don't matter as much as you'd think. I've wrestled in big arenas in front of 20,000 fans and seen plenty of guys in the locker room just going through the motions, like they were punching a time clock and just trying to put their match behind them. No matter how flashy the lights are and how good the sound system is, if the boys in the back aren't up for putting on a good show, then it's going to be a long night.

Over the past eight years, the Super 8 has built a reputation among both fans and wrestlers alike, even in Mexico and Japan.



# 21W3IV OWT LITTLE TOURNAMENT WORLD

Photos by Joe Zanolle

Why do so many up-and-coming independent wrestlers covet a spot in the annual ECWA Super 8 Tournament? Austin Aries knows. In the span of a few hours, a new star can be created, and, as Aries proved and explains, it isn't always the winner of the event

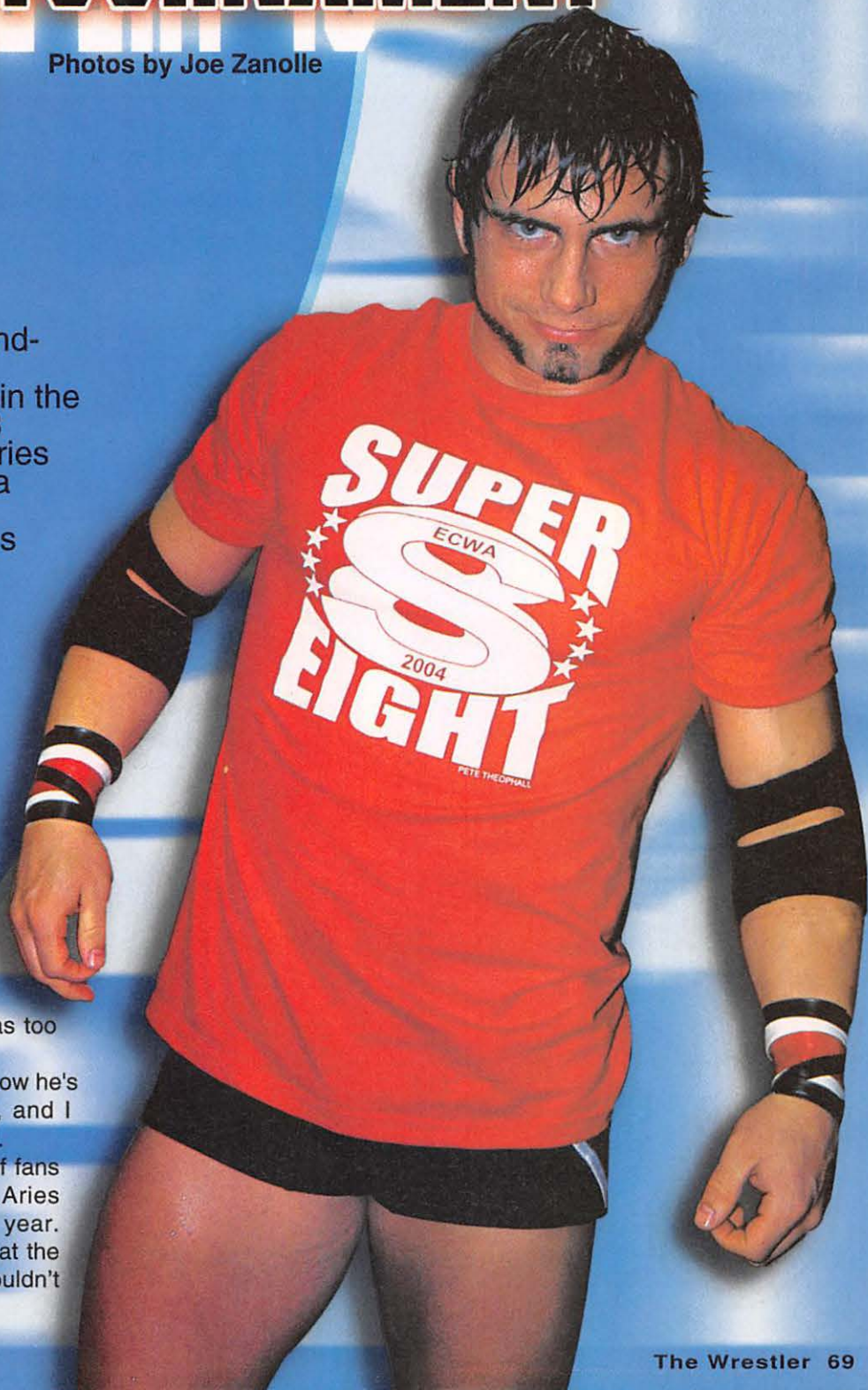
By Austin Aries

**"WHO'S HE?"**

One year ago, that's what the fans were asking about Paul London. People were saying he was too small to make it big as a wrestler or that he was too much of a pretty boy.

Paul won the Super 8, and now he's in WWE. He blazed the trail, and I was intent on following his lead.

I'm sure there were plenty of fans who heard the name Austin Aries and asked, "Who's he?" this year. And I'm sure most of the fans at the 2004 Super 8 Tournament wouldn't





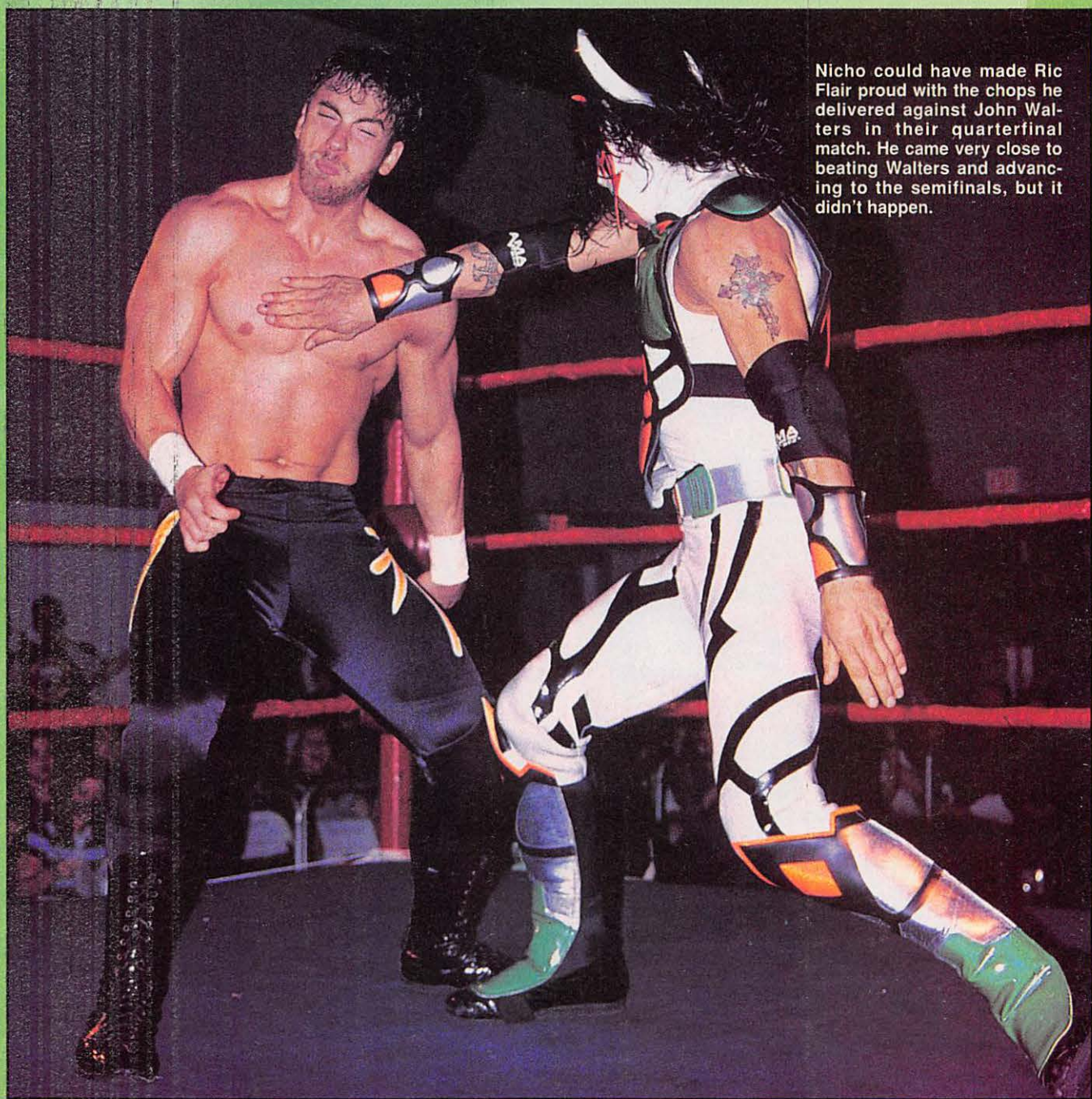
Some very talented wrestlers have taken part in the event and put the emphasis on technical wrestling, and that has made the Super 8 maybe the most respected independent wrestling showcase in the U.S.

I was deeply honored when ECWA promoter Jim Kettner called and invited me to take part in this year's tournament. I have been very fortunate in my career to have had success in both Mexico and in ECW and WCW in the U.S. Thankfully, I regularly receive offers from promoters in both countries and have not had to struggle for bookings like other wrestlers. At this point in my career, I only take the ones that mean something to me. So the moment I was offered a spot in the Super 8, I cleared my schedule to be sure I was in Delaware on April 3.

I arrived at St. Matthew's Parish Hall around 2:30 that

afternoon. Already, there was excitement in the air. Some of the other Super 8 participants, like John Walters, Mike Krue, and The Havana Pit Bulls, were already stretching out in the locker room. They all greeted me warmly and professionally, and we traded stories from the road for a while. Jim was helping the ring crew set up chairs and making sure everything was in order. It's not often that you see a promoter out there doing the grunt work, but Jim was there setting up tables and checking the ring ropes, taking a very hands-on approach.

More wrestlers filtered in and all of the Super 8 participants visited and wished each other luck. There was an atmosphere of mutual respect that is hard to find these days. Even though I knew I would face John



Nicho could have made Ric Flair proud with the chops he delivered against John Walters in their quarterfinal match. He came very close to beating Walters and advancing to the semifinals, but it didn't happen.





Austin Aries didn't just want to beat Shawn Daivari in their quarterfinal encounter—he wanted to do it with style, to make people remember how he did it. Missions accomplished with his 450 splash.

have given me a chance in hell of making it to the finals, not against guys like Nicho, Christopher Daniels, John Walters, and the ECWA's homegrown favorite, Mike Krue. I was an afterthought, and I knew it. That was my inspiration.

The Super 8 Tournament is the most high-profile independent card in America. Look at some of the guys who competed in the past: London, Billy Kidman, Scotty Too Hotty, Matt Hardy, Jeff Hardy, Spanky. All of them used the Super 8 as a springboard to the big time. A.J. Styles used it to get one of the top spots in NWA-TNA, and I hear Donovan Morgan is making a great living in Pro Wrestling NOAH.

When I got the invitation to compete in this year's Super 8, I knew it was my ticket to some big and exciting things in this sport. I was going to do anything I could to win that tournament. If I fell short, maybe I'd still be the one people were talking about. "Where did this kid come from? How can I find out more about Austin Aries?"

This was the opportunity of a lifetime, and I wasn't going to let it get away from me without making the most of it.

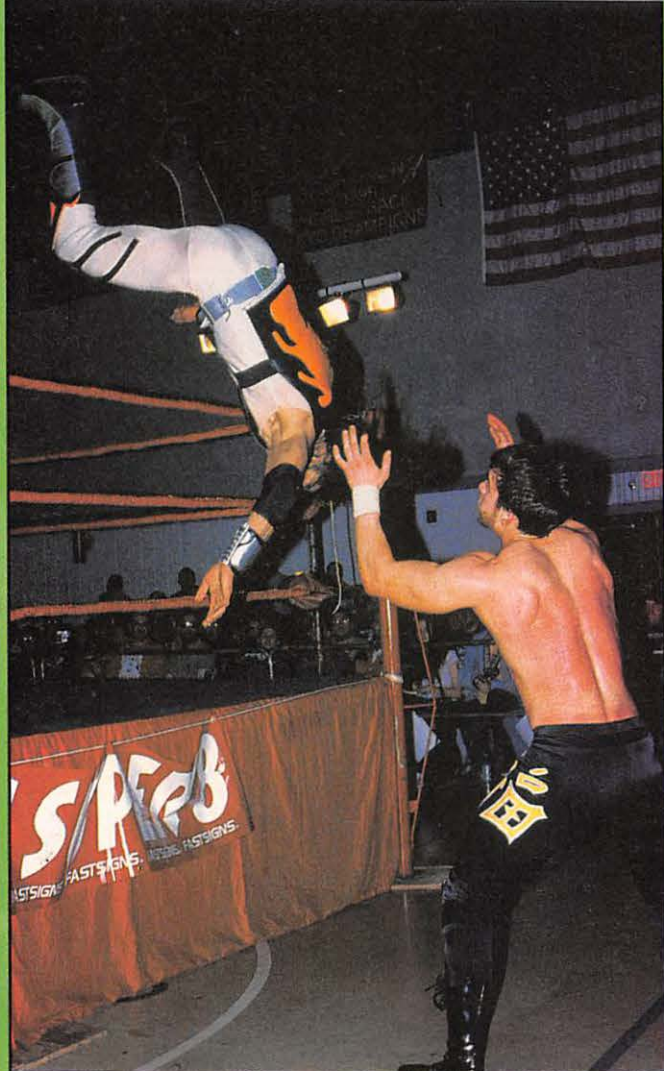
Shawn Daivari probably had the same idea. He tried to put me away with that magic carpet ride finisher in the first match, but he took so much time playing with his rug that I was able to roll out of the way. He wanted to end the match with a move the fans would talk about, so I did him one better. I nailed him with my 450 splash to get the pin and advance to the semifinals.

I knew most people probably considered me the underdog against John Walters, since Walters has gotten so much exposure in Ring of Honor. All the more reason I had to beat him. If I wanted to make a name for myself, I had to beat someone with name recognition, and Walters had it. And I had to put him away in grand style. That meant the 450.



Aries tried everything he could to beat Chris Daniels, including some unorthodox submission holds, and it still wasn't enough. There was no shame for him in losing to Daniels, and he's happy to report that a lot of promoters took notice.





It was nice to see Nicho break out some of the aerial tactics that first endeared him to American fans in ECW nearly a decade ago. Losing early in the tournament was disappointing to him, but not crushing.

Walters in the first round, we chatted like old friends. While all of us wanted to win, we were honored simply to be a part of the card.

The tension continued to build throughout the afternoon. We went through the pre-show photo shoot, then gave a brief press conference. It was still more than an hour before the opening bell and I was feeling the butterflies in my stomach. But I wanted to take it all in and savor every moment of that day.

I don't usually get nervous before matches. I've been doing this for 13 years now, ever since I was 19 years old, in front of live crowds 20 times the size of the crowd in St. Matthew's and with hundreds of thousands more watching on pay-per-view. But I was nervous on this night.

Most of the guys viewed this tournament as the biggest event of their career. They looked at Paul London, who signed with WWE a few months after winning last year's Super 8. Everybody was hungry, including me.

I've been around long enough to understand how hard it is to get a WWE deal. Chris Daniels won the tournament in 2000, and he never got the call from WWE. But for one night, the eyes of the wrestling world were on the eight of us. All I wanted to do was to compete to the best of my

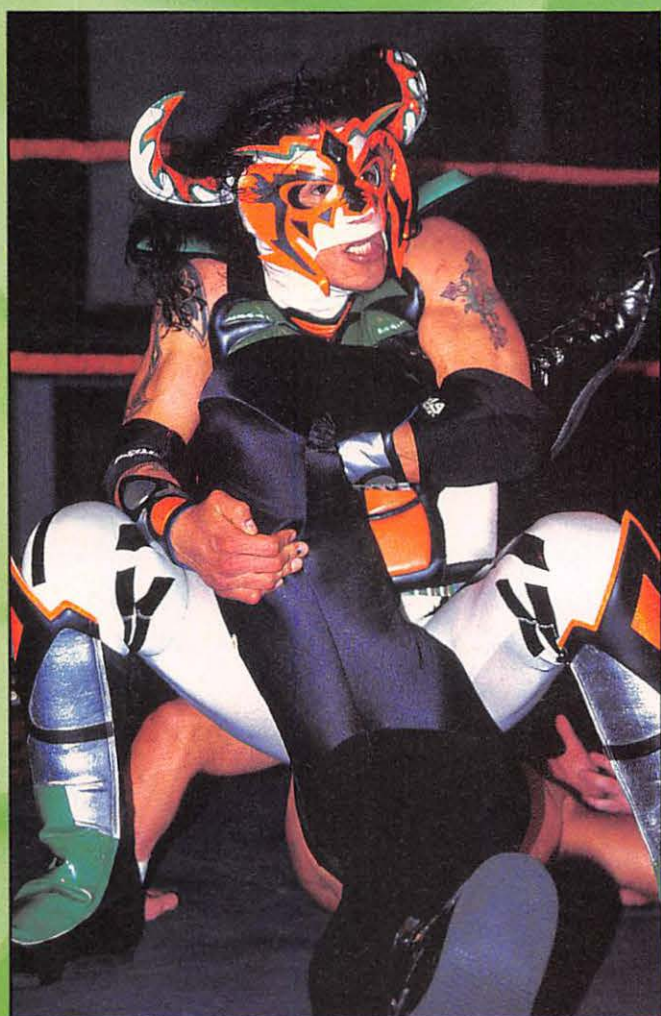
abilities, to wrestle the best match I could. If I could beat Walters, then I could think ahead to the second round.

I didn't have stars in my eyes. But I wanted to give the best effort of my career.

As it turned out, even my best effort wasn't enough. I lost to Walters in the opening match. After the match, we shook hands and I walked back to the locker room. It was an interesting feeling as I sat in back and unlaced my boots. I didn't quite feel disappointed or angry. I was sad about not advancing, but I was happy with the effort I made. I was part of history. On that night, Walters was a better man. If we wrestled again, I'd like to think I would be the better man. But that is what the Super 8 is all about: competitive matches between some of the top talents in the world. How could I feel upset at myself for losing to a wrestler the caliber of Walters?

I know I pushed Walters to a new level. I know the fans were entertained. I know I did the best I could and I left everything I had on that mat.

I was extremely proud to be a part of this event. Thank you, Jim Kettner, for allowing me to be part of one of the most rewarding cards of my career. □



Perhaps Walters had more resolve and was a bit more resilient than Nicho expected. Winning was important to the former Psicosis, but soaking up the whole experience of the day and night meant just as much.



Walters caught me twice as I tried to hit my finisher, but the third time got the job done. I was pretty sore from the rolling suplexes he hit me with, but I wasn't going to let him know that. I got the three-count and was headed to the finals.

It was almost like I could hear it, 500-plus fans all wondering, *Who is this guy?*

I'm Austin Aries. Don't forget the name.

Unfortunately, I couldn't get by Christopher Daniels in the finals. I tried pretty much everything I knew to beat that guy. But every time I hit a move, he'd get back to his feet. I just couldn't keep his shoulders down. I felt sick to my stomach. I was so damn close to winning, so damn close to that trophy and the worldwide recognition it brings. I just couldn't get the job done and Daniels pinned me after hitting three consecutive moonsaults.

Have you ever watched the Stanley Cup Finals? Have you ever seen the look on the faces of the losing team when they have to shake the winning team's hands? I always hoped I'd never have to know how that felt. And it was more miserable than I'd imagined. But he deserved it.

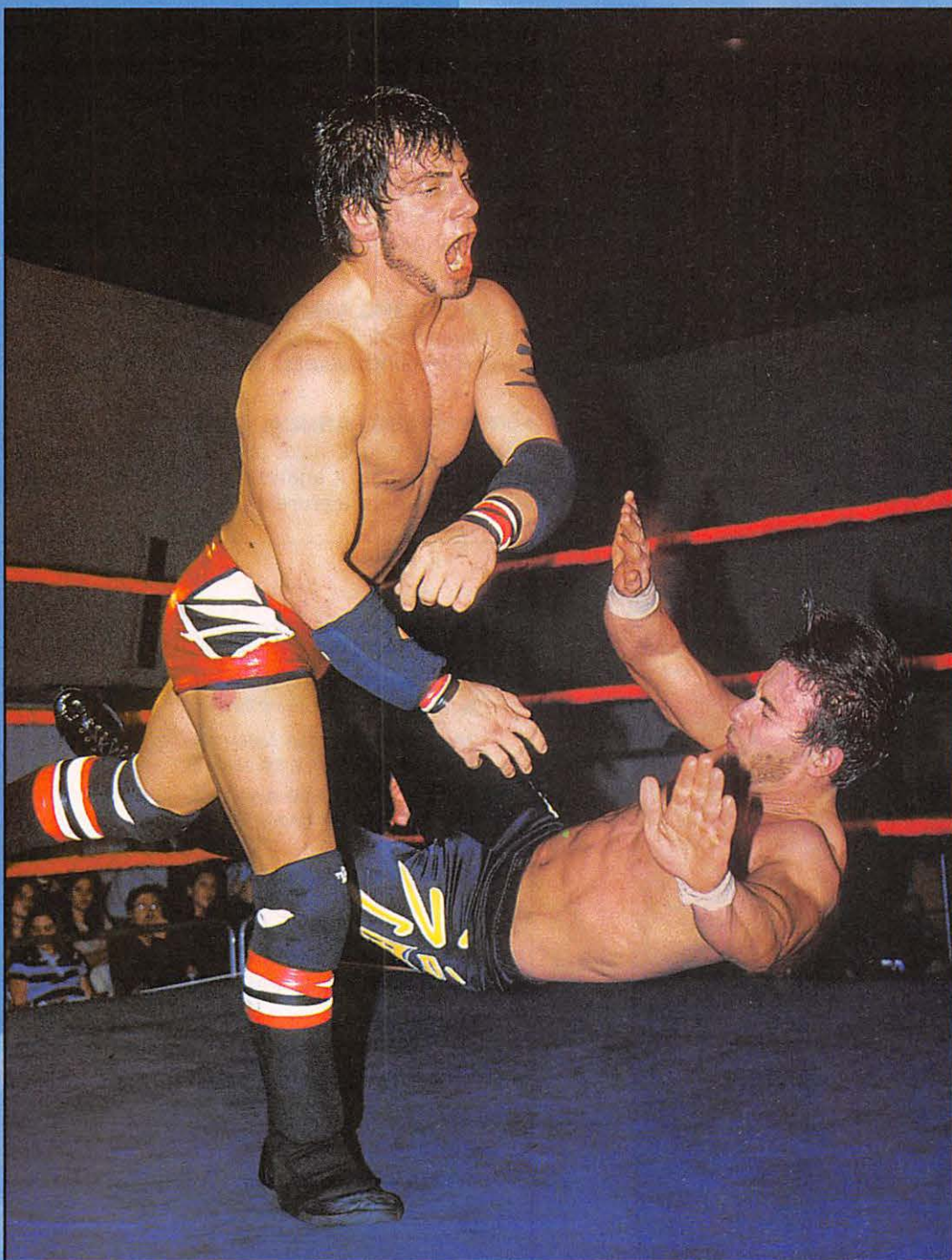
I left that building feeling like I just blew my chance for greatness. Yeah, I beat Dai-vari and Walters, but how much good did that do me if I didn't win in the finals?

It wasn't until the next day, when I checked my answering machine, that I realized what the Super 8 had done for my career. A half-dozen promoters were calling to book me. Ring of Honor wanted to bring me aboard. Chris Daniels called and congratulated me on the match,

something I never would have expected.

Some people spoke about my intensity. Others about my hunger. Another guy actually said I have star quality, whatever that means.

By putting my best foot forward at the Super 8, I've landed more bookings than ever. I've made new contacts and hope to have a great second half of 2004. One writer came over to me after the show and said I was the "buzz" wrestler of the 2004 Super 8, the one people went home talking about. That puts me in some pretty good company. And like Paul London, Spanky, and all the rest, Austin Aries plans to make the most of it. □



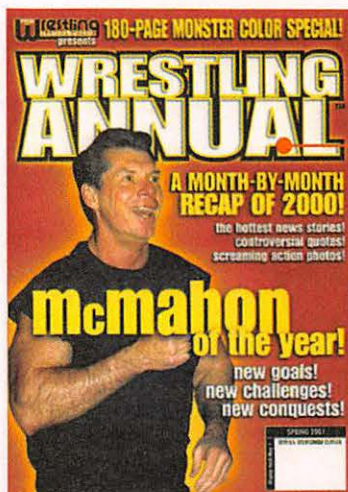
A victory over John Walters, a rising star in Ring of Honor, would be a huge win for Aries, and he knew it. He pulled off the upset and could then start dreaming about what winning the whole thing would mean.



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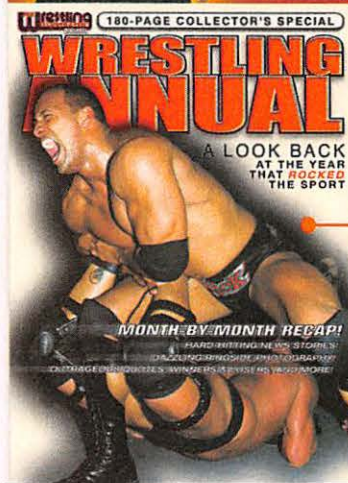
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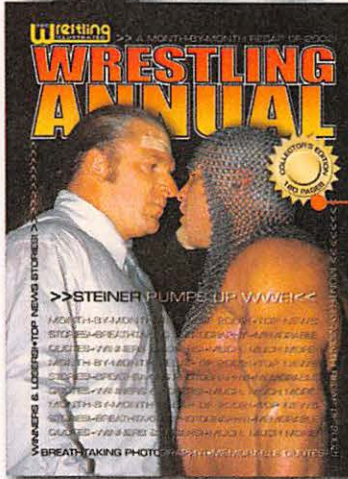
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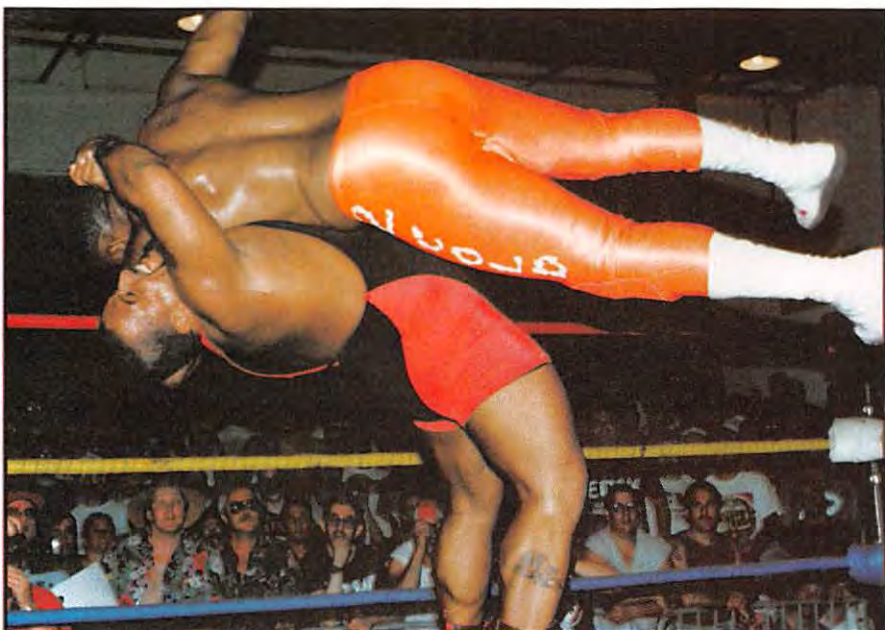
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## YOUR LETTERS

(Continued from page 7)



Tazz has been widely praised for his work as a color commentator, but we know of at least one reader who wants him back in the ring attempting suplexes.

### TAZZ TURNS SOFT?

I was watching No Way Out and I have to say that Tazz and Michael Cole are both jackasses. They both had a problem with Goldberg coming to the event, getting into the ring, and confronting Brock Lesnar. Goldberg was cool sitting in the front row until Lesnar challenged him to come into the ring so they could settle their situation. Tazz and Cole both condemned Goldberg for getting into a fight with Lesnar. I can remember when Tazz was a part of ECW. He and his associates once came to a WWE event and disturbed it at the urging of Paul Heyman.

So what is the difference? Tazz has turned into a corporate butt-kisser. I used to like him for his unbiased opinions and commentary. I long for the days when Tazz used to wrestle, so I could watch him have a match with someone like Lesnar. That would be a suplex clinic. But alas, that will not happen because Tazz is retired and reluctant to get back in the ring and do what he does best.

Wcdtucker@aol.com

[Editor's note: Now there's a second reason!]

### BEST ("Q & A") THERE WAS

I just wanted to say that the "Q & A" with Bret "Hitman" Hart (May 2004) was great! I have been a wrestling fan since I was seven, and since Bret has been out of wrestling, I have missed him immensely. One of the first matches I ever saw was The Hart Foundation against The Bushwhackers. After that, I was hooked on wrestling. I grew up admiring Bret and was always left speechless when he wrestled. When he went into singles competition, I was shocked. But he kept getting better and better and became *the man*. He was the best technical wrestler in the world. I just wanted to say thank you to Bret for all the years of service and the memories. You're the best and you will never be forgotten.

LEE WILDER  
Houston, TX ☐

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## WHAT'S HAPPENING

(Continued from page 9)



Jim Ross has stepped down as head of WWE's talent relations department. The good news for fans is that he doesn't have any plans to step down as the number-one play-by-play man for Raw. Perhaps that's bad news to Eric Bischoff.

has the potential to be the biggest challenge of Goldberg's career.

More on American shootfighters in Japan: **"The Beast" Bob Sapp** de-

feated **Kensuke Sasaki** to win the IWGP heavy-weight title on March 28 at Sumo Hall in Tokyo. Remember that that championship was once held by **Hulk Hogan** (in 1983-1984) and helped to propel him to international superstardom. At almost 400 pounds, Sapp is an even more incredible physical figure than the "Hulkster" was. It will be interesting to see if he also can use that prestigious title as a steppingstone to bigger and better things in the U.S.

One more Japanese item to note: Weeks after being released by WWE, **Sean O'Haire** signed for a K-1 showdown against **Hiroshi Tanahashi**. O'Haire has extensive kickboxing

experience and should make an impact in the ultra-competitive Japanese shootfighting ranks.

Finally, two major independent

cards have been announced for July and August 2004 in Buffalo, New York. "Ballpark Brawls" II and III (the first took place last year and featured Jarrett, Raven, and **Sabu**) will take place on July 17 and August 14. Signed to appear thus far are **"Rowdy" Roddy Piper**, **Konnor**, **Teddy Hart**, **Julio Dinero**, and Abyss, with more names to be announced soon.

The event is being promoted by the Buffalo Bisons, the AAA affiliate of the Cleveland Indians. According to Bisons spokesman and event promoter **Christopher Hill**, a tournament will be held to name the "natural" champion. That title will be defended at AAA ballparks throughout the Northeast.

"I've been told last year's Brawl was the second largest independent show [in terms of attendance] in the country in 2003," Hill said. "This year, we're going to have the first and second largest independent shows."

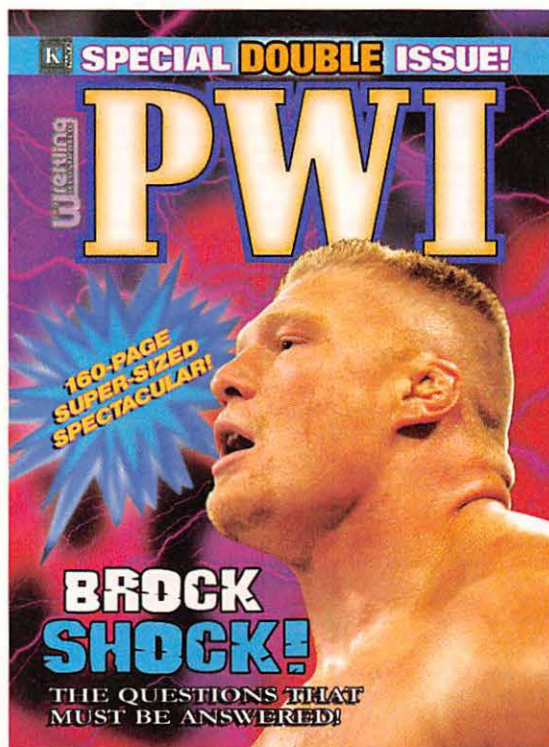
That's what's happening. Catch ya again next issue. □



Twenty years after Hulk Hogan took a big step toward becoming an international superstar by winning the IWGP title, Bob Sapp has captured that same prestigious championship. Might he also look to conquer America next?



# this month in...

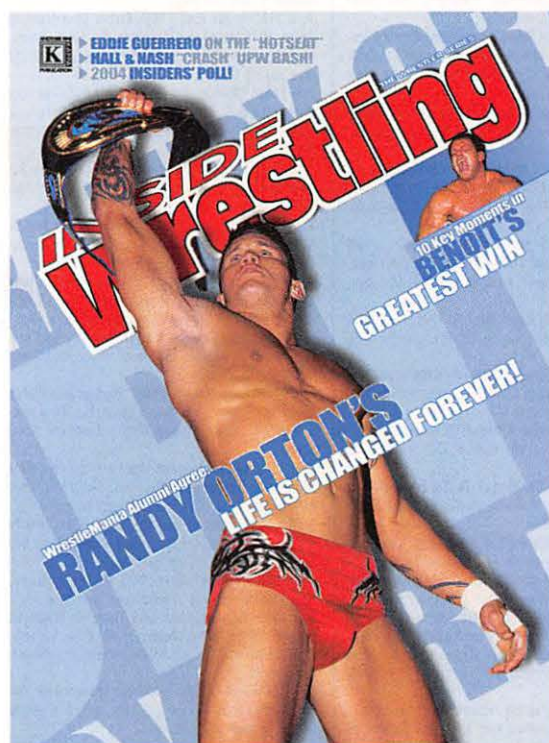


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**April 1980:** Did Ken Patera Destroy Dusty Rhodes' Bionic Elbow? Also: Terry Funk, Kevin Von Erich, DiBiase-Backlund, Bockwinkel & Heenan, Baba-Race, Mr. Wrestling II, Youngblood & Steamboat.

**Aug. 1980:** The Reign Of Bloodshed Begins: Stevens & Valentine Win The NWA Tag Team Title! Also: Kerry Von Erich, Backlund & Skandland, Nick Bockwinkel, Zbyszko-Bruno, Keim-Muraco, Samoans, Wrestling II-Idol.

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**Sept. 1981:** Why Ernie Ladd Says ... "I'm Tired Of Being Your King." Also: Rick Steamboat, Mad Dog Vachon, Bugsy McGraw, Patera-Patterson, Manny Fernandez, Bob Backlund, Greg Gagne, Mike Sharpe.

**Feb. 1981:** Larry Zbyszko's Claim: "Tony Garea Begged Me Not To Hurt Him!" Also: The Grappler, Race-Patera, Hussein Arab, Humperdink-Rhodes, Gilberts, Mr. Wrestling II, Bravo-Bockwinkel.

**Oct. 1981:** Is The Funk Family At War? Why Terry Funk And Dory Funk Jr. Were Forced To Wrestle. Also: Backlund-Patterson-Mosca, Harley Race, Rhodes-Khan, Kevin Sullivan, Flair-Patera, Verne Gagne.

**Aug. 1982:** Nick Bockwinkel: "Tommy Rich Is Too Stupid To Be Champion!" Also: Putski-Adonis, Blackjack Mulligan Jr., Roddy Piper, Rick Steamboat, Lawler-Kaufman, Mike Graham.

**April 1982:** How Jack Brisco Controls Ric Flair's Championship Destiny. Also: Tito Santana, Valentine-Atlas, Bob Roop, Armstrongs, John Studd, Eric Embry.

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**June 1982:** Ric Flair vs. Rick Steamboat: How The NWA Belt Strangled Wrestling's Greatest Friendship. Also: Piper-Armstrong, Hussein Arab, Bruno Sammartino, Adonis & Ventura, Butch Reed.

**July 1982:** Harley Race—His Destiny Is In The Hands Of Tommy Rich. Also: Rick Steamboat, Chief Jay Strongbow, Buzz Sawyer, Ric Flair, Roddy Piper.

**Sept. 1982:** Dusty Rhodes Returns To Florida: The Tragic Comeback That Should Not Have Happened. Also: Manny Fernandez, Armstrong-Piper, Blaisie-Mulligan, Japan, Bockwinkel-Hogan.

**Nov. 1982:** Clash Of The Titans—Backlund vs. Flair: Who's Better? Also: Roddy Piper, Gagne & Brunzell, Putski & Snuka, Brian Blair.

**Dec. 1982:** Morales vs. Snuka: Does Pedro Deserve To Be Intercontinental Champion? Also: Bob Orton Jr., Kamala, Rich & Rhodes, Barry Windham, Ted DiBiase, JYD-Bockwinkel, Oliver Humperdink.

**Jan. 1983:** Ivan Putski Humiliates Cowboy Bob Orton: Can The Grand Wizard Pick Up The Pieces? Also: Barry Windham, Muraco-Sawyer-Rich, Nick Bockwinkel, Flair-Youngblood-Steamboat, Fabulous Kangaroos.

**Feb. 1983:** Exclusive Coverage: Nick Bockwinkel Regains The AWA Title From Otto Wanz. Also: Backlund-Graham, Rich-Sawyer, Barry Windham, Martel & Garea, McDaniel & Piper, Kamala.

**May 1983:** What Will Happen When The Samoans Become Too Smart For Capt. Lou Albano? Also: Tommy Rich, Terry Allen, Eddie Gilbert, Kerry-Race, Ladd & Rhodes, Flair-Orndorff.

**June 1983:** Flair-Windham Match Spurs Controversy: Should The NWA Champion Be Allowed To Choose His Challengers? Also: Ivan Koloff, Bruiser Brody, Kerry Von Erich, Andre-Kamala, Brazz-Valentine, Gagne-Martel.

**July 1983:** Ric Flair: "I Wrestle The Men Backlund Is Afraid Of." Also: Putski-Adonis, Kevin Sullivan, Bob Roop, Martel-Heenan.

**Sept. 1983:** Nick Bockwinkel Forces Hulk Hogan Into Exile: And Only The Fans Can Bring Him Back. Also: Brisco, Blackwell-Kerry-Race, Paul Ellering, Mulligan & Windham.

**Nov. 1983:** Target—Harley Race Can Dusty Rhodes Fulfill His American Dream A Third Time? Also: Rick Rude, Rotundo-Kabuki, Gagne & Brunzell, Tito Santana, Von Erichs-Freerbirds.

**Dec. 1983:** The Night The AWA World Title Was Stolen From Mil Mascaras. Also: Roddy Piper, Larry Zbyszko, Dino Bravo, Fabulous Ones, Garvin & Sunshine.

**March 1984:** Is Tito Santana Trying To Blackmail The WWF? Also: Wayne & Sawyer, Hogan-Race, David Von Erich, Jesse Ventura.

**July 1984:** Tommy Rich Is Back! And He Owes It All To The Fans. Also: Valiant-Rhodes, Ric Flair, Mike Von Erich, Billy Jack.

**Aug. 1984:** Garvin vs. Roberts: "Hands Of Stone" Crushes "The Snake." Also: Freebirds-Devastation Inc., Sawyer-Sullivan, Lawler & Dillon, McDaniel-Race.

**Nov. 1984:** The \$50,000 Full-Nelson Challenge Match: Billy Jack Gets Bloody Revenge Against Superstar Graham. Also: Roddy Piper, Heenan & Saito, Brody & Hansen, Kerry Von Erich.

**Dec. 1984:** The Tully Blanchard-Rick Steamboat Feud: Will Dusty Rhodes End It ... Or Make It Worse? Also: Tito Santana, Martel-Atlas, D. Funk, Mike Von Erich, Williams-Taylor.

**Jan. 1985:** Kerry Von Erich: "I've Got Ric Flair's NWA Title Within My Grasp." Also: Albano & Lauper, Koloffs & Kernodle, Road Warriors, Lawler & Rude, Scott McGhee.

**Feb. 1985:** Greg Valentine Wins Tito Santana's Intercontinental Title ... But Does He Deserve To Be Champion? Also: Ronnie Garvin, Warriors-Sheepherders, Flair-Billy Jack, Nikita Koloff.

**April 1985:** Six-Man Riot! Road Warriors & Ellering vs. Rhodes, Rich, & Anderson. Also: Tonga Kid, tomorrow's stars, Adams-Kevin, Flair-Jack, Terminators.

**May 1985:** The Road Warriors vs. Dusty Rhodes & Manny Fernandez: Exclusive Coverage Of The Historic Tag Team Superbowl! Also: Al-Kaissie-Gagne, Backlund-Race, Haynes-Kamala, Tito Santana.

**June 1985:** Are The WWF Rulebreakers Singling Out Barry Windham For Destruction? Also: Zbyszko-Backlund, Rhodes-Blanchard, Tommy Rich, Oliver-Haynes.

**July 1985:** It's A Dog's Life ... And Junkyard Dog Wouldn't Trade It With Anyone! Also: Backlund-Martel, Kernodle-Koloff, Butch Reed, Hernandez & Sunshine, Mike Graham.

**Aug. 1985:** Ten Days Of Blood And Glory: The Road Warriors Invade Japan! Also: Terry Taylor, Magnum T.A., Bugsy McGraw, Sheik & Volkoff-Windham & Rotundo, 20th anniversary.

**Oct. 1985:** David Schultz Gets An NWA Title Shot: Ric Flair—"I Wrestle The Men Hulk Hogan Is Afraid Of!" Also: Misty Blue, Rick Martel, Kendall Windham, George Steele, Killer Brooks, all-time top 10.

**May 1986:** Von Erich Family Feud: Is Lance Coming Between Kevin And Kerry? Also: Hansen-Hall, Hillbillies-Beefcake & Valentine, Butch Reed, Santana-Ventura.

**June 1986:** Ric Reveals His Secret: "I've Told Magnum T.A. How To Beat Ric Flair!" Also: Steve Williams, Hogan-Orton, Flair-Bockwinkel, Lex Luger.

**Nov. 1986:** Morton & Gibson Take A Trip To Badstreet U.S.A.: The Rock 'n' Roll Express vs. The Freebirds. Also: Eddie Gilbert, Hogan-Orndorff, Mike Von Erich, Mulligan-Bass.

**Dec. 1986:** Ric Flair's NWA Title Reign: Last Chance To Silence The Critics! Also: Nikita Koloff, Gilbert & Sting, Hogan-Piper, Abdullah-Adams, Nick Bockwinkel.

**Jan. 1987:** Bobby Heenan's Bitter Crusade To Destroy Hulk Hogan. Also: Borne & Sawyer, Garvins, Ted DiBiase, Misty Blue Simmes.

**Feb. 1987:** Tragedy Strikes Wrestling: Magnum T.A. Needs Your Prayers Now More Than Ever. Also: Roberts-Steamboat, Crusher Yorkoff, Terry Gordy, Wendell Cooley.

**March 1987:** Ivan & Khushchev's Kremlin Orders: Crush Nikita Koloff's Russian Revolution! Also: Barry Windham, One Man Gang, Brian Adias, Savage-Steamboat, Jimmy Snuka.

**June 1987:** The Hart Foundation vs. The Can-Ams: Special Analysis Of This WWF Superfeud! Also: Nick Bockwinkel, Paul Orndorff, Rhodes & Murdoch, Steve Williams.

**July 1987:** Missy Hyatt: Will She Kiss And Tell In The WWF? Also: Chris Adams, Hart Foundation, Luger & Horsemen, Nikita-Cornette, Stan Hansen.

**Sept. 1987:** Independence Day! Also: Hennig-Bockwinkel, Hart Foundation, Koloffs, Bubba Rogers, Missy Hyatt.

**Oct. 1987:** The Honky Tonk Man Wins The Intercontinental Title: Is Randy Savage The Fans' Last Hope. Also: Kerry Von Erich, Ken Patera, Sting-Gilbert, Horsemen-Freebirds, Zbyszko-Gagne.

**Dec. 1987:** Hulk Hogan: Will He Be Drowned By The New Wave Of Challengers? Also: Hennig-Lawler, Windham-Steiner, Flair-Williams, Brutus Beefcake, Ronnie Garvin.

**Jan. 1988:** The Experts Agree: The Road Warriors Will Turn Bad In 1988! Also: Koloff-Taylor, Curt Hennig, Duggan-DiBiase.

**Feb. 1988:** Ric Flair Admits: "I'm Nothing Without The NWA Belt!" Also: Kerry Von Erich, Jim Cornette, Hogan-Andre, Hennig-Lawler, Terry Taylor.

**March 1988:** After Four Years As Champion ... Only Hulk Hogan Can Beat Hulk Hogan. Also: Warriors-Demolition, Steve Williams, Luger & Dillon, Calgary, Terry Gordy.

**May 1988:** Belt Or No Belt ... Hulk Hogan Is Still The People's Champion! Also: Owen Hart, Tatum & Victory, Scott Hall, Madusa Miceli, Luger-Arn.

**June 1988:** How Sting's War With Ric Flair Could Make Him A Horseman! Also: Bobby Heenan, Martel-Zenk, Kerry-Gordy, Ted DiBiase, Nikita Koloff.

**Aug. 1988:** World Tag Title Power Shift! Also: Windham & Luger, Demolition, Taylor-Freebirds, Paul Ellering, Owen & Bret.

**Oct. 1988:** The Fantastics Declare: "We Will Not Share Our Fans With The Rock 'n' Roll Express!" Also: Rhodes-Windham, Curt Hennig, Roberts-Rude, Rougeaus, Jim Garvin.

**Jan. 1989:** The Horsemen Destroyed! The World Title Gained! But The Midnight Express Must Still Prove Themselves! Also: Top Guns, Hart & Rougeaus, Andre-Savage-Hulk, Terry Gordy, Kevin Von Erich.

**March 1989:** Scared Stiff! "Don't Say Snakel!" Also: Jeff Jarrett, Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Bam Bam Bigelow, Hercules, Iron Sheik.

**June 1989:** Hulkamania Runs Wild Again! Can Randy Savage Stop The Onslaught? Also: British Bulldogs, Road Warriors-Sting & Luger, Lawler-Kerry, Andre, Mike Rotundo.

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**April 1991:** Hulk Hogan: The Challenges That Remain. Also: Ted DiBiase, Skyscrapers, Lex Luger, Tom Zenk, Fabulous Ones.

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**Jan. 1993:** Sting Turns Sadistic: "Hurting Jake Makes Me Happy!" Also: Anderson & Eaton, Bushwhackers-Moondogs, Ramon-Savage, Natural Disasters, Masa Chono.

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**Holiday 1996: WCW Shocker: Randy Savage Is Set To Join Hulk Hogan's NWO!** Also: Steve Austin, Michaels-Goldust, Arn Anderson, Van Dam-Sabu, Steve Williams.

**Jan. 1997: It Could Happen! Hogan's Next Move ... Buy WCW!** Also: Undertaker, New Jack, Owen-Bulldog, Ted DiBise.

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**April 1998: "We've Won!" Maybe ... But Can The NWO Handle Its Own Success?** Also: Ken Shamrock, Steiners-Warriors, Douglas & Francine, Rocky Maivia.

**May 1998: Mike Tyson: Stepping Into Wrestling Hell!** Also: Bischoff-Bret-Zbyszko, Meng & Barbarian, Hunter Hearst Helmsley, ECWA ladder match.

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**July 1998: Death Wish! Costing Hogan The Title Isn't Enough For The Macho Man: What's Next?** Also: Ric Flair, Headbangers-Rock 'n' Rolls, Chris Chetti, Mero & Sable.

**Aug. 1998: We Stand Behind Ya, Vince! It's Time To Fire Austin.** Also: Luna-Sable, Randy Savage, Dean Malenko, Super 8 tourney.

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<input type="checkbox"/> SEP 80	<input type="checkbox"/> FEB 85	<input type="checkbox"/> JAN 89	<input type="checkbox"/> JAN 92	<input type="checkbox"/> JUL 95	<input type="checkbox"/> NOV 98	<input type="checkbox"/> JAN 01
<input type="checkbox"/> FEB 81	<input type="checkbox"/> APR 85	<input type="checkbox"/> MAR 89	<input type="checkbox"/> FEB 92	<input type="checkbox"/> OCT 95	<input type="checkbox"/> DEC 98	<input type="checkbox"/> MAR 01
<input type="checkbox"/> JUN 81	<input type="checkbox"/> MAY 85	<input type="checkbox"/> APR 89	<input type="checkbox"/> MAR 92	<input type="checkbox"/> NOV 95	<input type="checkbox"/> HOL 98	<input type="checkbox"/> MAY 01
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<input type="checkbox"/> OCT 81	<input type="checkbox"/> JUL 85	<input type="checkbox"/> JUN 89	<input type="checkbox"/> MAY 92	<input type="checkbox"/> WIN 95	<input type="checkbox"/> FEB 99	<input type="checkbox"/> SEP 01
<input type="checkbox"/> APR 82	<input type="checkbox"/> AUG 85	<input type="checkbox"/> JUL 89	<input type="checkbox"/> JUN 92	<input type="checkbox"/> MAY 96	<input type="checkbox"/> MAR 99	<input type="checkbox"/> NOV 01
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<input type="checkbox"/> JAN 83	<input type="checkbox"/> FEB 87	<input type="checkbox"/> JUL 90	<input type="checkbox"/> FEB 93	<input type="checkbox"/> JAN 97	<input type="checkbox"/> NOV 99	<input type="checkbox"/> MAR 03
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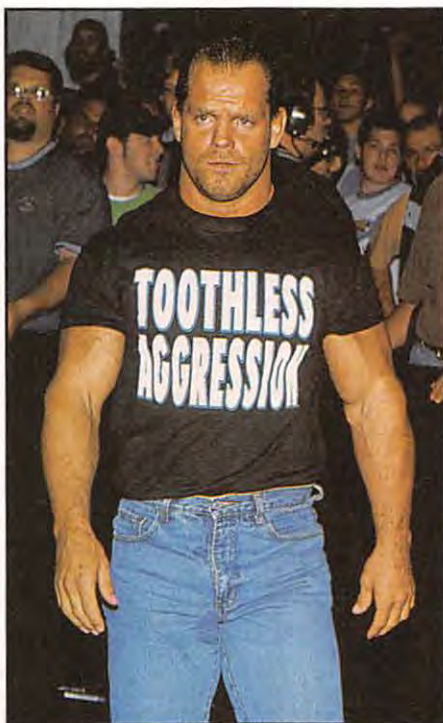
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# Wrestler<sup>®</sup> the

## TOP 10

- 1 CHRIS BENOIT**  
224, Edmonton, Alberta  
(5) **WWE Raw** champion
- 2 EDDIE GUERRERO**  
223, El Paso, TX  
(2) **WWE Smackdown** champion
- 3 TOSHIKI KAWADA**  
245, Ashikaga, Japan  
(7) **All-Japan Triple Crown** champion
- 4 SHAWN MICHAELS**  
217, San Antonio, TX  
(6) **No. 1** contender: **WWE Raw** title
- 5 KENTA KOBASHI**  
282, Fukuchiyama, Japan  
(3) **GHC** heavyweight champion
- 6 RANDY ORTON**  
265, St. Louis, MO  
(-) **WWE Intercontinental** champion
- 7 JOHN CENA**  
260, Los Angeles, CA  
(-) **WWE U.S.** champion
- 8 A.J. STYLES**  
202, Gainesville, GA  
(-) **NWA** heavyweight champion
- 9 BOB SAPP**  
374, Seattle, WA  
(-) **IWGP** heavyweight champion
- 10 TRIPLE-H**  
269, Greenwich, CT  
(1) **No. 3** contender: **WWE Raw** title



Chris Benoit

## TAG TEAMS

- 1 CHRIS BENOIT & EDGE**  
Combined weight: 464 pounds  
(-) **WWE Raw** tag team champions
- 2 MINORU SUZUKI & YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA**  
Combined weight: 514 pounds  
(9) **IWGP** International tag team champions
- 3 MITSU HARU MISAWA & YOSHINARI OGAWA**  
Combined weight: 430 pounds  
(2) **GHC** tag team champions
- 4 CHARLIE HAAS & RICO**  
Combined weight: 493 pounds  
(-) **WWE Smackdown** tag team champions
- 5 BUH BUH RAY & D-VON DUDLEY**  
Combined weight: 579 pounds  
(8) **No. 1** contenders: **WWE Smackdown** tag title
- 6 KID KASH & DALLAS**  
Combined weight: 494 pounds  
(-) **NWA** tag team champions
- 7 BATISTA & RIC FLAIR**  
Combined weight: 561 pounds  
(6) **No. 1** contenders: **WWE Raw** tag title
- 8 RIKISHI & SCOTTY TOO HOTTY**  
Combined weight: 641 pounds  
(1) **No. 2** contenders: **WWE Smackdown** tag title
- 9 KAZ HAYASHI & SATOSHI KOJIMA**  
Combined weight: 416 pounds  
(3) **All-Japan** International tag team champions
- 10 THE BASHAM BROTHERS**  
Combined weight: 492 pounds  
(5) **No. 3** contenders: **WWE Smackdown** tag title

## WWE RAW

Raw Champion:

**CHRIS BENOIT**

- (1) 224, Edmonton, Alberta
- 1—SHAWN MICHAELS**  
(2) 217, San Antonio, TX
  - 2—RANDY ORTON**  
(3) 265, St. Louis, MO
  - 3—TRIPLE-H**  
(C) 269, Greenwich, CT
  - 4—CHRIS JERICHO**  
(6) 225, Winnipeg, Manitoba
  - 5—SHELTON BENJAMIN**  
(-) 245, Minneapolis, MN
  - 6—EDGE**  
(-) 240, Toronto, Ontario
  - 7—CHRISTIAN**  
(9) 225, Toronto, Ontario
  - 8—KANE**  
(4) 326, St. Louis, MO
  - 9—BATISTA**  
(5) 318, Washington, DC
  - 10—GARRISON CADE**  
(-) 253, Omaha, NE

## WWE SMACKDOWN

Smackdown Champion:

**EDDIE GUERRERO**

- (C) 223, El Paso, TX
- 1—JOHN CENA**  
(4) 260, Los Angeles, CA
  - 2—JOHN BRADSHAW LAYFIELD**  
(-) 306, Roscoe, TX
  - 3—BOOKER T**  
(-) 250, Houston, TX
  - 4—CHAYO GUERRERO JR.**  
(5) 185, El Paso, TX
  - 5—ROB VAN DAM**  
(-) 237, Battle Creek, MI
  - 6—RENE DUPREE**  
(-) 250, Montreal, Quebec
  - 7—MARK JINDRAK**  
(-) 253, Auburn, NY
  - 8—HARDCORE HOLLY**  
(6) 249, Mobile, AL
  - 9—SPIKE DUDLEY**  
(-) 155, Providence, RI
  - 10—REY MISTERIO JR.**  
(7) 163, San Diego, CA

## OVW

OVW Champion:

**MATT MORGAN**

- (-) 330, Fairfield, CT
- 1—JOHNNY JETER**  
(2) 218, San Diego, CA
  - 2—INSPECTOR IMPACT**  
(6) 285, Phoenix, AZ
  - 3—MARK MAGNUS**  
(1) 231, Syracuse, NY
  - 4—MATT CAPPOTELLI**  
(7) 220, Norwich, NY
  - 5—JOHNNY NITRO**  
(5) 204, Los Angeles, CA
  - 6—NOVA**  
(-) 214, Bricktown, NJ
  - 7—MAVEN**  
(-) 210, Chantilly, VA
  - 8—STANDING THUNDER**  
(-) 229, Louisville, KY
  - 9—BRENT ALBRIGHT**  
(-) 230, Tulsa, OK
  - 10—SETH SKYFIRE**  
(-) 224, Louisville, KY

## RING OF HONOR

ROH Champion:

**SAMOA JOE**

- (C) 270, American Samoa
- 1—HOMICIDE**  
(1) 220, Brooklyn, NY
  - 2—A.J. STYLES**  
(2) 202, Gainesville, GA
  - 3—BRYAN DANIELSON**  
(-) 185, Aberdeen, WA
  - 4—B.J. WHITMER**  
(-) 210, Owensboro, KY
  - 5—COLT CABANA**  
(-) 235, Chicago, IL
  - 6—C.M. PUNK**  
(4) 220, Chicago, IL
  - 7—MATT STRYKER**  
(6) 220, Cincinnati, OH
  - 8—JERRY LYNN**  
(-) 216, Minneapolis, MN
  - 9—ALEX SHELLEY**  
(-) 199, Detroit, MI
  - 10—JOHN WALTERS**  
(7) 220, Boston, MA



# OFFICIAL RATINGS

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder of the issue.

For period ended April 30, 2004

**BAD 2 THE BONE WRESTLING:** Champion—Vic the Bruiser; 1—J.C. Bailey; 2—Billy Black; 3—Loco; 4—Randy Royal; 5—Simon Sezz; 6—Steve Marino; 7—Billy Maverick; 8—Apollo; 9—Menace; 10—Evil Intentions.

**BUCKEYE PRO WRESTLING:** Champion—Shark Boy; 1—Chris Canyon; 2—Dean Jablonski; 3—Nigel McGuinness; 4—Matt Stryker; 5—Cody Hawk; 6—Spyder Webb; 7—Chad Collyer; 8—B.J. Whitmer; 9—Ala Hussein; 10—Jimmy Turner.

**CENTRAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE:** Champion—Mongoose; 1—Terry Alan; 2—Jad T. Lungini; 3—Doug Vines; 4—Redneck Superstar; 5—Raziel; 6—Little Guido; 7—J.T. Money; 8—J.D. Thunder; 9—Chase Daniels; 10—Chopper.

**CHIKARA:** Champion—Hallowicked; 1—Mike Quackenbush; 2—Jigsaw; 3—Eddie Kingston; 4—Jack Marciano; 5—Gran Akuma; 6—Icarus; 7—Jolly Roger; 8—Mister ZERO; 9—UltraManfis; 10—Shane Storm.

**EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION:** Champion—Christopher Daniels; 1—Ace Darling; 2—Prince Nana; 3—Cheetah Master; 4—Mike Krue; 5—John Walters; 6—Austin Aries; 7—Mike Fury; 8—Mr. Ooh La La; 9—Johnny Maxx; 10—Japanese Pool Boy.

**MIDWEST POWERHOUSE WRESTLING:** Champion—Bob Orton Jr.; 1—The Searcher; 2—Damian Blade; 3—Scar; 4—Christian Haze; 5—Chico Es Loco; 6—Uriah; 7—Curtis Payne; 8—Pride; 9—Xavier Frost; 10—Devan Scott.

**NORTHEAST WRESTLING:** Champion—Title Vacant; 1—Jerry Lawler; 2—Al Snow; 3—Julio Dinero; 4—Dusty Rhodes; 5—Simon Diamond; 6—Xavier; 7—Jeff Starr; 8—Johnny Heartbreaker; 9—Mike Quackenbush; 10—Red.

**NWA WILDSIDE:** Champion—Onyx; 1—Mikal Adyran; 2—Jason Cross; 3—Caprice Coleman; 4—Rainman; 5—Gabriel; 6—Jeremy V; 7—Fast Eddie; 8—Ray Gordy; 9—Azrael; 10—Seth Delay.

**PRO WRESTLING ENTERTAINMENT:** Champion—Mike Quackenbush; 1—Flex Fenom; 2—Aidean; 3—Hacksaw Duggan; 4—Shane Shadows; 5—Johnny Graham; 6—John Balsamo; 7—Brock Singleton; 8—Gran Akuma; 9—Demolition Ax; 10—Icarus.

**RING WARS CAROLINA:** Champion—Dr. Love; 1—DJ P. Roc; 2—Eddie Brown; 3—The Stro; 4—Hangtime; 5—Aaron Devil; 6—Ali Steele; 7—Draven; 8—Simply Delicious Dino; 9—Ouga Bouga; 10—Tre G.

**SUPERSTARS OF AMERICAN WRESTLING:** Champion—Billy Maverick; 1—Eric Draven; 2—Bryan Johnson; 3—Mason the Mangler; 4—Chris Jester; 5—Mike Dreamer; 6—Bruiser Brady; 7—The Droik; 8—Bubba Black; 9—Phoenix; 10—Psycho.

**WORLD XTREME WRESTLING:** Champion—Mana; 1—Rapid Fire Maldonado; 2—Samu; 3—Guapo; 4—Gene Snisky; 5—Homicide; 6—Havoc; 7—Sugaa; 8—Boogalou; 9—Cabbie; 10—Prodigy.

## NWA

NWA Champion:

**A.J. STYLES**

(4) 202, Gainesville, GA

**1—JEFF JARRETT**

(C) 230, Nashville, TN

**2—RAVEN**

(1) 243, Short Hills, NJ

**3—CHRIS HARRIS**

(-) 232, Fort Wright, KY

**4—RICKY MURDOCH**

(3) 261, Houston, TX

**5—ABYSS**

(-) 295, Cincinnati, OH

**6—J.T. WOLFEN**

(2) 297, New Haven, CT

**7—FRANKIE KAZARIAN**

(-) 220, Yucca Valley, CA

**8—JERELLE CLARK**

(-) 190, Orlando, FL

**9—STEVE WILLIAMS**

(-) 265, Norman, OK

**10—ONYX**

(9) 218, Jamaica City, NY

## NWA-TNA

NWA Champion:

**A.J. STYLES**

(2) 202, Gainesville, GA

**1—FRANKIE KAZARIAN**

(-) 220, Yucca Valley, CA

**2—JEFF JARRETT**

(C) 230, Nashville, TN

**3—RON KILLINGS**

(-) 230, Charlotte, NC

**4—CHRIS HARRIS**

(5) 232, Fort Wright, KY

**5—RAVEN**

(6) 243, Short Hills, NJ

**6—ABYSS**

(4) 295, Cincinnati, OH

**7—RED**

(-) 147, Brooklyn, NY

**8—SABU**

(-) 220, Bombay, India

**9—MICHAEL SHANE**

(3) 221, San Antonio, TX

**10—SONJAY DUTT**

(-) 185, Bombay, India

## JAPAN

**1—TOSHIAKI KAWADA**

(2) 245, Ashikaga, Japan  
All-Japan Triple Crown champion

**2—KENTA KOBASHI**

(1) 282, Fukuchiyama, Japan  
GHC heavyweight champion

**3—BOB SAPP**

(-) 374, Seattle, WA  
IWGP heavyweight champion

**4—KENSUKE SASAKI**

(7) 251, Tokyo, Japan

**5—KEIJI MUTO**

(5) 245, Yamanashi, Japan

**6—SHINYA HASHIMOTO**

(9) 287, Gifu, Japan

**7—JUN AKIYAMA**

(-) 225, Hiroshima, Japan

**8—JUSHIN LIGER**

(-) 222, Hiroshima, Japan

**9—YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA**

(-) 270, Sapporo, Japan

**10—HIROYOSHI TENZAN**

(3) 270, Tokyo, Japan

## MEXICO

**1—MR. NIEBLA**

(3) 185, Cuatitlan, Mexico

**2—EL HIJO DEL SANTO**

(2) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico

**3—L.A. PARK**

(4) 235, Torreón, Mexico

**4—LATIN LOVER**

(-) 190, Monterrey, Mexico

**5—ULTIMO GUERRERO**

(10) 173, Mexico City, Mexico

**6—ABISMO NEGRO**

(-) 210, Pachuca, Mexico

**7—SHOCKER**

(1) 185, Guadalajara, Mexico

**8—SUPER CRAZY**

(-) 215, Mexico City, Mexico

**9—HECTOR GARZA**

(-) 220, Monterrey, Mexico

**10—JUVENTUD GUERRERA**

(-) 165, Mexico City, Mexico



# WOW<sup>®</sup>

Remember her?

Don't recognize the face? You almost definitely won't recognize the hair unless you happened to follow this (sometimes) delightful diva in one of her previous wrestling lives. Here's a hint: Try to picture this lovely lass without those long locks. Try to picture without any locks at all. Imagine her with a wig. There you go. It's former WWE women's champion Molly Holly, the vivacious vixen who had her head shaved bald by Victoria at WrestleMania XX. Starla was a lot more pleasant and easy-going than Molly is today, but as we've seen recently, Molly is so very dangerous now. We bet she wishes she could have the old Starla Sexton hair back right about now!





*Randy*  
**Orton**  
WWE Intercontinental champion  
Photo by Duane Long





*Chris*  
**Benoit**  
WWE Raw champion

